

THE RISE OF ANTI-LGBTQI+ EXTREMISM AND VIOLENCE IN THE UNITED STATES

HEARING BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS SECOND SESSION

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THE RISE OF ANTI-LGBTQI+ EXTREMISM AND VIOLENCE IN THE UNITED STATES

Wednesday, December 14, 2022

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM,
Washington, D.C.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:10 a.m., in room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building, and via Zoom; the Hon. Carolyn B. Maloney [chairwoman of the committee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Maloney, Norton, Lynch, Connolly, Raskin, Khanna, Tlaib, Porter, Bush, Brown, Davis, Welch, Johnson, Kelly, DeSaulnier, Gomez, Pressley, Comer, Foxx, Hice, Grothman, Cloud, Gibbs, Keller, Fallon, Herrell, and Donalds.

Also present: Representatives Cicilline and Jones.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The committee will come to order.

Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess of the committee at any time.

I now recognize myself for an opening statement.

It is with a heavy heart that I convene today's hearing to examine the rise of extremism and violence against LGBTQI+ people in the United States.

Last month a person with an AR-15-style assault rifle entered Club Q, a nightclub that served as a haven for LGBTQI+ people in the Colorado Springs community, and opened fire on unsuspecting bar patrons and staff.

The attacker's depravity robbed us of five innocent lives—Daniel Aston, Raymond Green Vance, Kelly Loving, Ashley Paugh, and Derrick Rump.

More than a dozen people were injured in the rampage, and family members and loved ones who were left reeling have been forced to pick up the pieces. My heart breaks for those who endured this ruthless act of violence.

The Club Q shooting represents an attack on all sacred places for LGBTQI+ people across the country that offer the promise of community and refuge from rampant bigotry.

In attacking Club Q, the shooter targeted the sense of safety among the LGBTQI+ people across the country, a feeling of security to which they are entitled.

The attack on Club Q and the LGBTQI community is not an isolated incident, but part of a broader trend of violence and intimidation across our country.

Earlier this month, a group of extremists appeared at a Lakeland, Florida, arts festival featuring drag performances to harass and intimidate performers and attendees. The extremist group,

whose faces were concealed by masks, carried a banner with anti-LGBTQI+ slurs and raised their arms in Nazi salutes.

And in my own community in New York City, home of Stonewall and the international capital of the LGBTQI+ rights movement, a man was arrested for throwing bricks at the windows of a gay bar on four different occasions.

These actions are the culmination of years of anti-LGBTQI extremism that began in statehouses across the country and spread to social media platforms before boiling over into the communities where we reside.

In 2018, Republicans in state governments across the country introduced 110 pieces of legislation targeting the health and safety of LGBTQI people. In the past legislative session, this number tripled to more than 340 pieces of anti-LGBTQI legislation.

These bills which villainize LGBTQI+ people in classroom settings and target healthcare for LGBTQI people and more directly threaten the freedom of LGBTQI people to live authentically and safely.

For example, one piece of legislation signed into law by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis prohibits teachers from even mentioning LGBTQI+ people in classrooms. This, quote, “Don’t Say Gay Or Trans,” end quote, law erases the existence of LGBTQI people and families and muzzles our nation’s brightest educators.

Within a month of Florida passing this legislation, two additional states passed similar bills. In total, 48 bills in more than 20 states have considered eliminating or suppressing LGBTQI people and history in the school curriculum.

Here in Congress, dozens of House Republicans have cosponsored Federal legislation to prohibit Federal funding for schools with curricula that affirms LGBTQI people. And Republicans at every level of government have gone even further to villainize transgender people, targeting their ability to access necessary healthcare and restricting their freedom to participate as full members of our society.

These hateful pieces of legislation have fueled a dangerous rise in extreme anti-LGBTQI rhetoric following the passage of Florida’s Don’t Say Gay or Trans law. Vitriolic social media content accusing members of the LGBTQI community of being groomers skyrocketed by more than 400 percent.

The committee received a video submission from Ms. Sarah Kate Ellis, the president and CEO of GLAD, one of the nation’s leading LGBTQI+ media advocacy organizations, explaining the proliferation of anti-LGBTQI+ extremism across our media landscape and its relationship to the kind of violence we observed at Club Q.

I’d like to play this video now if we could.

[Video shown.]

Chairwoman MALONEY. Thank you.

As Republicans have fanned the flames of bigotry, Democrats have remained committed to protecting and advancing the health, safety, and rights of the LGBTQI+ people.

Last year House Democrats passed the Equality Act, landmark legislation that would enshrine protections against discrimination for LGBTQI+ people into law.

And this past June, to commemorate Pride Month, this committee shepherded the LGBTQI+ Data Inclusion Act to House passage. This groundbreaking legislation would expand Federal data collection efforts to improve our ability to understand and address the specific challenges facing the LGBTQI+ people.

More than 200 House Republicans voted against each of these pieces of legislation.

As a longtime public servant, the fight for LGBT+ equality is one that has always been close to my heart. As a New York City Council member serving the very community where the famous queer activist Edie Windsor resided, I was proud to introduce the first legislation recognizing domestic partnership in New York state history.

Just last week, Congress took the historic step of protecting the right to same-sex marriage under Federal law, and President Biden signed it into law yesterday with over 5,000 Americans on the lawn of the Capitol appreciating this act. But the work of ensuring that LGBTQ+ people can live authentically and safely is only just beginning.

Today we will hear from some of the nation's leading experts regarding the rise of anti-LGBTQI extremism, the damage it inflicts upon our communities, and the steps we must take to eliminate it.

I am pleased to welcome the new president of the Human Rights Campaign, Ms. Kelley Robinson, for her first appearance before Congress.

We will also hear directly from survivors of the violent Club Q attack. And I am deeply grateful for the bravery of these individuals in recounting their horrific experiences. Their testimony will serve as a tremendous public service for their community and for our nation.

Thank you.

Let us honor them by recommitting to the bold action necessary to ensure that every person in the United States can experience the freedom to live authentically and safely regardless of who they love or how they identify.

I now yield to the distinguished ranking member, Mr. Comer from Kentucky, for his opening statement.

Mr. COMER. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank our witnesses who have joined us today for our last full committee hearing under Chairman Maloney's tenure, and I'll have more to say about that at the conclusion of the hearing.

My thoughts and prayers go out to the Colorado and Florida shooting victims' families and friends. No one should have to experience what you all have experienced.

Let me state clearly, as we have consistently said, Republicans condemn violence in all forms. Unfortunately, Democrats are using committee time and resources today to blame Republicans for this horrendous crime. This is not an oversight hearing. This is a blame Republicans so we don't have to take responsibility for our own defund the police and soft on crime policies.

Just a quick review of the facts tells us the individual responsible for these heinous crimes was not a stranger to law enforcement. In fact, the shooter was arrested last year for violent threats against their mother. And no doubt about it, this individual has a

sad and troubled past with no parental support. But Democrats, as usual, have intentionally jumped to conclusions while ignoring the facts. Why? Because it's politically convenient to blame your political opponents.

It's easier to blame Republicans than have a serious discussion about the rise of violent crimes across the nation, including this individual's heinous crimes at Club Q in Colorado. It's easier, but it's also irresponsible and reckless.

Instead, we should be focused on the alarming rise of violent crime across our country today, crimes that target all races and ethnicities. We are seeing rises in threats and crimes across many communities and institutions, including historically Black colleges and universities, Asian communities, Jewish communities, and Christian communities. Churches and pro-life institutions are facing a historic increase in violence and targeted attacks which go largely underreported. The Department of Justice has remained fairly silent as well.

The rise in crime in America is the second-largest concern for Americans, second only to this administration's inflation crisis. Recent data shows that violent crime increased by 4.2 percent nationwide over the first six months of 2022.

In New York, violent crime increased by more than 40 percent compared to 2021. In Los Angeles, homicides reached their highest levels in 15 years during the first half of 2020. In New Orleans, homicides increased by 40 percent. Right here in D.C., homicides were up 14 percent from 2020 to 2021.

Crime is simply out of control in large Democrat-led cities. The extent of the rise in crime, however, may even be worse than the current data shows. Recent reporting revealed the FBI's national crime data for 2021 was largely incomplete, lacking data from 37 percent of law enforcement agencies nationwide. The FBI's national crime data does not even include full crime reports from New York, Los Angeles, two of the largest and most crime-stricken cities in the country.

On this committee, we should be using our time and resources to conduct oversight into the rise of violent crimes committed against all Americans and organizations. Everyday Americans, no matter what side of the aisle, are living in the high crime environment.

Democrats' defund the police movement has successfully taken resources from and crushed the morale of police forces across the country. Without the police, we lose our first line of defense for victims of all crime.

In addition, Democrats have focused on electing leftist prosecutors with soft-on-crime policies and allowing crime to run rampant in the United States. No one wants to see horrific events like what happened in Colorado and Florida occurring in America. More needs to be done to reverse soft-on-crime policies and refund the police to make the streets of America's cities and towns safe.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today, especially about the spike in crime across the country, underpolicing, and increase in violence against all Americans.

Thank you, Madam Chair. And I yield back.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentleman yields back.

Before we introduce our witnesses, I'd like to ask unanimous consent to allow Congress Members David Cicilline and Mondaire Jones to participate in today's hearing for the purposes of asking questions.

Without objection, so ordered.

Now we will introduce our first panel of witnesses. Please note that these witnesses will only be giving statements; they will not be taking questions.

First, we will hear from Michael Anderson, a survivor of the Club Q shooting.

Then we will hear from Mr. Matthew Haynes, founding owner of Club Q.

Finally, we will hear from Mr. James Slaugh, a survivor of the Club Q shooting.

And the witnesses will be unmuted so we can swear them in.

Please raise your right hand.

Do you swear or affirm that the testimony you're about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth so help you God?

Let the record show that the witnesses answered in the affirmative.

Thank you.

Without objection, your written statements will be made part of the historical record of this meeting.

With that, Mr. Anderson, you are now recognized for five minutes for your testimony.

STATEMENT OF MICHAEL ANDERSON, SURVIVOR OF CLUB Q SHOOTING

Mr. ANDERSON. To the distinguished members of the House Oversight Committee, thank you for inviting us here today.

Growing up in Lakeland, Florida, I was taught in my private religious school and by many conservative voices to hate who I was, that being born gay was something to reject.

A young person should never have to feel that way. So, I waited silent and suffering until I was 16, and then I came out.

It was places like gay bars and clubs that helped me embrace who I was and formed me into the man I am today. Club Q was and will, once again, be a safe place, not just for the LGBTQ community, but for everyone else, too.

If you are fortunate enough to intimately know LGBTQ people, you will find some of the kindest, funniest, accepting, and most welcoming people. Those are the people that found a safe place in Club Q and deserve to, once again, have that safe space.

On November 19, 2022, a deranged shooter entered Club Q armed with an assault rifle, a pistol, an incredibly disturbing amount of ammunition, and an even more disturbing amount of hatred in their heart, all while cowardly hiding behind a bulletproof vest.

The shooter entered our safe space and our home with the intention of killing as many people as possible as quickly as possible. They used a military-style weapon that exists solely for the intention of killing other human beings and began to hunt us down as if our lives meant nothing.

I was bartending that evening when the attack began. I felt more terrified than I ever have before in my life. I ran for my life that night and hid, praying and hoping the violence would end. When I stared down the barrel of that gun, I realized I stood no chance against a weapon of that power, magazine capacity, and seemingly automatic firing rate.

While I prepared for my life to end in that moment, I prayed, I panicked, and I prayed some more. God must have heard my prayers because two brave men stopped the shooter moments before he would have inevitably found me.

I saw my friend lying on the floor, bleeding out, knowing there was little to no chance of surviving that bullet wound. I had to tell him good-bye while I continued to fear for my life not knowing if the attack was truly over.

I can still hear the rapid firing of bullets today. It's a sound I may never forget. It's a sound I hope no one here or anywhere else in this country has to hear.

I say all of this not because it's easy to do so, but because it's important to do so.

I plead you all to appeal to your heart, your morality, and your humanity to do something about this issue. I want to thank President Biden for fighting to reinstate the assault weapons ban, and I sincerely hope you will support that reform so that we may try to prevent more people from needlessly dying at the hands of that weapon.

Not only am I embarrassed for our country's international reputation of inaction on gun reform, but I am, frankly, disgusted.

Between 1994 and 2004, America's mass shooting incidents dropped dramatically. Following the expiration of the assault weapons ban, which the Republican Party allowed to expire under President Bush, we now have an epidemic of domestic terrorism and violence.

The time to do something is now. What needs to be done is placing the lives of children and adults above our unhealthy obsession with assault rifles, and you are some of the ones who can make a difference.

Many in our government say nothing can be done, this epidemic of violence is just the price we must pay for freedom in this country.

That is a lie. The facts speak for themselves, and your denial of this gun violence reality is not a policy proposal.

I encourage you all to work together to save our children and adults, and, in turn, save ourselves and the soul of our nation.

To the politicians and activists who accuse LGBTQ people of grooming children and being abusers, shame on you. As leaders of our country, it is your obligation to represent all of us, not just the ones you happen to agree with. Hate speech turns into hate action, and actions based on hate almost took my life from me at 25 years old.

I beg you all to consider your words before you speak them, for someone may use those words to justify action, action that may take someone's life.

To my fellow LGBTQ community, events like this are designed to discourage us from speaking and living our truth. They are de-

signed to scare us from living openly, courageously, and proudly. We must not succumb to fear. We must look prouder and louder than ever before. We must continue to be who we are, for who we are is exactly who we are meant to be.

And to the children watching this, feeling you may not be like the other kids, I understand you and I see you. You deserve to be exactly who you are no matter what anyone else has to say.

In the words of my personal icon, Christina Aguilera, "You are beautiful, no matter what they say. Words can't bring you down, so don't let them bring you down today."

To Chairman Maloney, I thank you for making this a priority. To the House Oversight Committee, thank you for hearing us today. I hope my truth can help usher America into its next and greatest chapter yet.

My name is Michael Anderson. I am 25 years old. I am a proud gay man. And now I am a survivor of a mass shooting. I hope we can work together to end this carnage in our country.

Thank you.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Thank you very much.

With that, we now recognize Mr. Haynes.

You are now recognized for your testimony.

STATEMENT OF MATTHEW HAYNES, FOUNDING OWNER OF CLUB Q

Mr. HAYNES. Thank you and good morning.

My name is Matthew Haynes, and I am the founding owner of Club Q in Colorado Springs.

I would first like to acknowledge and thank our local LGBTQ organizations, the city of Colorado Springs, the state of Colorado, and the national team at GLAAD and so many other organizations for the efforts and support they have all provided to our community.

Thank you, Chairman Maloney, for such an accurate and telling opening statement. And thank you, the House Oversight Committee, for creating the space and time to meet with us today.

I know that we, our Club Q community, are in the thoughts and prayers of so many of you. Unfortunately, these thoughts and prayers alone are not saving lives. They are not changing the rhetoric of hate.

None of us ever imagined that our little bar in Colorado Springs would be the target of the next hate crime. And I, again, repeat we were targeted for the next hate crime.

Last week, 305 charges were filed against the Club Q shooter. Forty-eight of these charges were hate-crime related.

The number 305 alone graphically illustrates just how heinous this act was and how many people in this community were impacted. It also illustrates how much damage can be done when you take hate and access to military-style assault weapons. Putting those together is total carnage. We were lucky that night that the casualties were not much higher.

When we opened 20 years ago, Colorado Springs was a very different place. I am proud to have remained in Colorado Springs over the years, even when we did not feel welcome.

Club Q has been a home for the community for 20 years. We are proud to say it will, once again, become our home. One man full of hate will not destroy us.

Now is a critical time for national, state, local, community, and religious leaders to drop the politics and work with our leaders and small business owners to support and affirm LGBTQ events, venues, communities, and most importantly, people.

We need safe places like Club Q more than ever. And we need you, our leaders, to support and protect us. We have received hundreds of hate comments. I cannot read them all, but I'm going to read you a few examples.

"I woke up to the wonderful news that five mentally unstable faggots and lesbians and 18 injured. The only thing I'm mad about is that the faggots had courage to subdue the wonderful killer. I hope more shootings happen. Have a blessed day."

"The shooter was doing God's work, five less faggots, not enough. Those that stopped him are the devil. All gays should die."

This is hate. It is not just us that is experiencing this. Our hero, Army veteran Rich Fierro, and his wife Jessica told me that they and their daughter have also been receiving similar hate messages.

Finally, my husband and I had the honor to attend the White House ceremony for the signing of the Respect for Marriage Act yesterday. It was honestly the first joy and pride I have felt since these horrific events at Club Q.

And while the protections for marriage like my own were signed into Federal law, I could not help but reflect that 169 Members of Congress voted against that bill; 169 of your colleagues, hiding behind excuses and schematics and other reasons, sent a message to me, and it was a clear message, that the entire community—I'm sorry—to me and the entire community that you do not respect my marriage.

And through your inaction and your vote, you as a leader send the clear message it is OK not to respect the basic human rights of loving who you love, and it is OK to disrespect and not support our marriages.

We are being slaughtered and dehumanized across this country in communities you took oaths to protect. LGBTQ issues are not political issues. They are not lifestyles. They are not beliefs. They are not choices. They are basic human rights.

And so, I ask you today not simply what are you doing to safeguard LGBTQ Americans, but rather, what are you or other leaders doing to make America unsafe for LGBTQ people?

Club Q is grieving. We are rebuilding. We are fighting. Let's stop this from happening again.

Thank you.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Thank you very much.

And, Mr. Slaugh, you are now recognized for your testimony.

STATEMENT OF JAMES SLAUGH, SURVIVOR OF CLUB Q SHOOTING

Mr. SLAUGH. Thank you.

My name is James Slaugh, and I want to thank the House Oversight Committee and Chairwoman Carolyn Maloney for allowing me to share my story today.

I want to start with my coming out story as it involves my family, their support, and, in the beginning, homophobia.

My sister Charlene actually helped pave the way for me to come out, for me to feel safe. She was forced out of the closet by our mother and ultimately forced out of the house.

When she was, our household went through a transformation. In the end, after a long process of learning and understanding, our mother chose her children and accepted who we are.

It was this road that allowed me to feel safe enough at 24 years old to say, "Hey, mom, I like guys," in a conversation. She recently passed away, but before she died, for the past 15 years, she became an advocate for our community. She chose love, and love will win in the end. And this goes especially in her religious circles who dehumanized us.

The events of November 19 were a nightmare come true and one of my biggest fears. Right before midnight on the eve of the Transgender Day of Remembrance, my boyfriend Jancarlos and I were about to leave Club Q when a shooter walked in.

Several pops rang out and I immediately felt a searing pain in my arm. I fell over on the ground, knowing I had been shot in my right arm. It wasn't working, but I was able to call 911.

I saw everyone on the ground, glass panes shattered, and blood running from my arm and chest where shrapnel had come through. Jancarlos was next to me, shot in the leg but thankfully alive.

To my horror, my sister Charlene was bleeding out. She had been shot over five times. My heart rended as she tried to dial 911 with her good arm outstretched. I called out to her, and I heard no response.

I don't want to imagine what may happen had the shooter not been taken down that night. Five wonderful people were still murdered and may we never forget their names—Ashley Paugh, Raymond Green Vance, Daniel Aston, Derrick Rump, and Kelly Loving. We miss each of you.

Club Q was a second home and safe space not just for me, but for all of us. Outside of these spaces, we are continually being dehumanized, marginalized, and targeted.

The fear-based and hateful rhetoric surrounding the LGBTQ+ community, especially around trans individuals and drag performers, leads to violence, it incites violence. We shouldn't have to fear being shot when we go to our safe spaces or anywhere for that matter.

It was only after this violation of our safe space that I came to realize, though, we have a lot more love in this world.

Before sunrise, we were already receiving messages from all over the world with affirmations of love, people we have never met giving us their best wishes. A family friend immediately started a GoFundMe, and we've experienced a ton of support.

When I left the hospital, I was brought to tears just by the memorial that had been created in front of the club, in front of my safe space.

I want to thank the Colorado victims' advocates who have been instrumental in our recovery and helping with funds and, of course, the staff at GLAAD who have simply been amazing in helping me use my voice.

Hate rhetoric from politicians, religious leaders, and media outlets is at the root of the attacks like at Club Q, and it needs to stop now, rhetoric that makes people less than for being different, rhetoric that threatens to silence what sports we can play, what bathrooms we can use, how we define our family, and who I can marry.

Every American, especially those elected to positions of power, has a responsibility and a choice to use their words consciously. Hate starts with speech. The hateful rhetoric you've heard from elected leaders is the direct cause of the horrific shooting at Club Q. We need elected leaders to demonstrate language that reflects love and understanding, not hate and fear.

I urge LGBTQ+ Americans and allies to join together today as one community. Hateful people want to drive us back into closets and to live our lives in fear, but we cannot be afraid. No bullets will stop us from being proud of who we are or will injure the support and love that exists in our community.

Thank you.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Thank you for sharing your incredibly powerful testimony with us today. We appreciate your taking the time to be with us, to join with our committee hearing. And you are all excused. Thank you so much.

We will briefly recess while the panels switch.

[Recess.]

Chairwoman MALONEY. The committee will come to order, and we will now introduce our second panel of witnesses, who will be taking questions.

First, we will hear from Ms. Kelley Robinson, the new president of the Human Rights Campaign.

Then we will hear from Ms. Olivia Hunt, policy director of the National Center for Transgender Equality.

Then we will hear from Dr. Ilan Meyer, distinguished senior scholar for public policy at the Williams Institute.

Then we will hear from Mr. Charles Fain Lehman, fellow at the Manhattan Institute.

Then we will hear from Ms. Jessie Pocock, CEO and executive director of Inside Out Youth Services.

Finally, we will hear from Mr. Brandon Wolf, survivor of the Pulse Nightclub shooting.

The witnesses will be unmuted now so that we may swear you in.

Please raise your right hand.

Do you swear and affirm that the testimony you're about to give is the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Let the record show that the witnesses answered in the affirmative.

Thank you.

Without objection, your written statements will be part of the record.

With that, Ms. Robinson, you are now recognized for your testimony. Congratulations on your election.

**STATEMENT OF KELLEY ROBINSON, PRESIDENT, HUMAN
RIGHTS CAMPAIGN**

Ms. ROBINSON. Thank you, Chair Maloney. Thank you, Ranking Member Comer and members of the committee, for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Kelly Robinson. My pronouns are she, her, hers. And I'm the president of the Human Rights Campaign, the nation's largest civil rights organization working to achieve equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people.

On behalf of our more than 3 million members and supporters, I am honored to testify at this important hearing and to demand united action to end the rising tide of hate and violence targeting our community.

I'm so grateful for the strength and courage of the Club Q survivors testifying here today. Compounding this tragedy is the fact that this incident is just one example of the violence that has shattered LGBTQ+ lives, our families, our communities in the past few years.

Violence and discrimination against LGBTQ+ communities are the tragic result of a society that devalues our lives, particularly the lives of Black and Brown transgender and gender nonconforming people.

And this hate and violence is on the rise. It's fueled by nearly unfettered access to guns, political extremism, and rhetoric that is deliberately devised to make our community less safe, less equal, and less free.

Violence has become a lived reality for so many in our community. Even in 2021, one in five of all hate crimes reported to the FBI were motivated by anti-LGBTQ+ bias.

These violent threats disproportionately impact transgender people. Over the last 10 years, the Human Rights Campaign has tracked over 300 incidents of fatal violence against transgender and gender nonconforming people. In 2022 so far, we've recorded the murders of 35 people. Among the community members lost this year, 85 percent were people of color and 85 percent were transgender women.

These acts of hatred have devastating consequences. Often these experiences leave community members, especially marginalized people, more likely to live in poverty, to experience housing instability and homelessness, and to lack access to opportunities that would allow them and their families to thrive.

This violence does not happen in a vacuum. Anti-LGBTQ+ lawmakers' efforts directly increase the risk of violence facing our communities today.

State lawmakers have advanced an onslaught of anti-LGBTQ+ bills to restrict where and how we can freely and openly be our true selves. In 2022, 344 of these bills were introduced across 23 states. More than 25 of these bills were ultimately enacted across 13 states, 17 of which have a disproportionate or targeted impact on transgender people.

These bills often target the youngest among us, harming children and their families. They also target the trained professionals like doctors and teachers who care for them.

These unrelenting efforts by extremist lawmakers help reinforce inflammatory narratives about our community regardless of whether or not the underlying bills are enacted.

These narratives have been weaponized many times in the past against our community to enact discriminatory laws, to encourage extremist rhetoric, and to enable violence.

The recent increase in anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric amplified by lawmakers is fueling growing attacks in our communities. It's happening in statehouses, in schools, and on street corners.

Yesterday, we released a report identifying 24 hospitals and providers across 22 states attacked online following misleading and inflammatory social media posts from bad actors.

Just last week, California State Senator Scott Wiener, himself a gay Jewish man, was the target of a bomb threat because of his support working with trans youth and their families. Included in the threat were two words: pedophile and groomer.

These threats are being made in every corner of our country targeting LGBTQ+ people, our spaces, and our allies. It's happening in Tulsa where vandals firebombed a donut shop after it hosted an art installation run by drag queens. It happened in Texas after a pastor uploaded a video asserting that gay people be, quote, "lined up against the wall and shot in the back of the head."

We must take action. We must take action to prevent future violence and harm against my communities.

First, social media companies, lawmakers, and other stakeholders must establish guidelines and practices to fight disinformation and hate online.

Second, we must pass the Equality Act to level the playing field and ensure that LGBTQ+ people are protected from discrimination.

And third, we have to pass commonsense gun safety measures to protect our communities from the most extreme acts of violence.

Ultimately, we all have to work to repudiate anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric and falsehoods in the strongest possible terms because our lives are quite literally on the line.

Thank you.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Thank you.

Then we will hear from Ms. Olivia Hunt, policy director of the National Center for Transgender Equality.

STATEMENT OF OLIVIA HUNT, POLICY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL CENTER FOR TRANSGENDER EQUALITY

Ms. HUNT. Thank you, Madam Chair, members of the committee. Thank you very much for convening this hearing and shining a light on the causes of the increasing violence facing the LGBTQ community.

Working at the National Center for Transgender Equality has been a dream job for me since before I started law school, and there's been no greater honor in my career than being invited here today to speak with the committee on behalf of my community.

This has been a dream job for me, but also a job that I hope will one day no longer be necessary. The past year's events make it clear, though, that day is still a long way off.

A month ago, my colleagues and I prepared a remembrance report honoring the 47 known transgender Americans whose lives have been lost to violence since November 2021.

We released it on November 18. Before dawn on Transgender Day of Remembrance, November 20, the shooting at Club Q meant it was already out of date.

Like all the acts of fatal violence targeting our community, the shooting at Club Q didn't happen in a vacuum.

This summer, Representative Comer tweeted that we need to examine the root causes of increased violence in America. Today, we're doing just that.

This violence was catalyzed by a cultural climate filled with anti-LGBTQ legislation, think pieces debating the validity of our humanity under the guise of just asking questions, politicians and public figures encouraging their bases to target and threaten LGBTQ-friendly events and organizations, and fearmongering in the press and on social media.

Most of these attacks and the misinformation that fuels them are targeted at trans people and far too often at trans youth. In 2022, NCTE tracked 207 different pieces of anti-trans legislation across 35 states. Twelve states enacted at least one of these bills. More than 80 percent of them targeted the rights of vulnerable trans youth and young adults.

In addition, this year politicians in several states used administrative rather than legislative processes to attack the rights of trans people. For instance, in Texas the attorney general misused his authority to harass the supportive families of trans children, falsely labeling their support of their children as child abuse.

When politicians and pundits treat trans people's lives as a matter of public debate, the media responds in kind, giving anti-trans advocates a larger platform to share their hostile rhetoric.

Sensationalist headlines lead stories that care more about attracting clicks and advertising impressions than in reporting the facts.

For example, just days before the Club Q shooting, The New York Times published a front-page article perpetuating misinformation about gender-affirming care for children.

Even when anti-trans policies are defeated, they impact the transgender public. In a 2021 study by The Trevor Project, 85 percent of trans youth reported that the public debates around their civil rights and their place in society left them scared, stressed, angry, and hopeless.

Even more concerning, the same dehumanizing rhetoric that harms trans youth also inflames anti-LGBTQ sentiment among the general public. When politicians and the media paint trans people as something to be treated with fear and disgust, people who are already receptive to that message take it to heart and it reinforces their prejudices. In their minds, trans people either become victims to be saved from ourselves or villains to be punished.

One example of this in action is the misuse of the term "groomer." Anti-LGBTQ activists have appropriated this terminology used by survivors of childhood sexual abuse and used it to slander LGBTQ people and our allies as predatory, harmful toward children.

In reality, trans people are significantly more likely to be the victims of sexual abuse than perpetrators of it. And now this misused terminology has become part of the political discourse around trans people and is invoked as a reason to further restrict our rights in the name of protecting children.

This same rhetoric has subsequently been used as justification for violent anti-LGBTQ activism. Heavily armed protesters have made numerous attacks or attempts at intimidation against family friendly Pride events and drag performances around the country.

Even hospitals have been targeted with bomb threats and intimidation tactics based on social media figures spreading baseless stories that the providers are, in their words, “mutilating children.”

There’s a straight line that can be drawn from the legislation trying to strip trans people of our human rights to the increasingly hostile and inflammatory rhetoric portraying us as a threat to society to the acts of violence that have taken far too many lives.

The people engaged in these efforts, from the politicians and media figures who normalize the dehumanization of trans people to the influencers who vilify us on social media to the people brandishing firearms and making bomb threats, bear culpability for the violence that ensues.

The Williams Institute estimates that there are 1.6 million Americans aged 13 and up who are transgender. We live in every state in the nation. We are librarians, we are your baristas, your postal workers, your IT department. We’re your children, your doctors, your nurses, and your ministers. Trans people are also your constituents.

Trans people are part of the fabric of American society. We belong, we deserve to be protected, and we matter.

Thank you.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Thank you very much.

And, Dr. Meyer, you are now recognized for your testimony.

Dr. Meyer.

STATEMENT OF ILAN MEYER, DISTINGUISHED SENIOR SCHOLAR FOR PUBLIC POLICY, THE WILLIAMS INSTITUTE

Mr. MEYER. Thank you.

Chairwoman Maloney, Ranking Member Comer, and distinguished members of the committee, I’m a public health researcher, senior scholar of public policy at the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law.

My area of expertise is the study of the effects of social stress related to prejudice and discrimination on the health of LGBTQ populations.

LGBTQ rights have seen significant developments in the past few decades, but homophobia and transphobia are embedded in American history and culture, and they produce stress, which I refer to as minority stress.

This stress intersects with stigma and prejudice based on other statuses so that different LGBTQ subgroups, such as LGBTQ people of color, experience this social stress differently. But every LGBTQ person has to learn to cope with stress related to stigma throughout their lives.

Studies have concluded that minority stress experienced by LGBTQ people can result in an array of mental health problems, including depressive symptoms, substance use, and suicide ideation and attempt.

In recent years we have seen a resurgence of anti-LGBTQ rhetoric and violence, including the recent shooting in Club Q in Colorado. But violence against LGBTQ people is not new.

In several recent studies analyzing data collected by the Department of Justice as part of the National Crime Victimization Survey, my colleagues and I found that the odds of experiencing a violent victimization, defined as rape or sexual assault, robbery, or aggravated or simple assault, were four times higher for LGBTQ than non-LGBTQ people.

Assessing victimization among transgender versus cisgender people specifically, we found that transgender people had four times the rate of victimization.

We also assessed the distribution of hate crimes, a subset of violent victimization, and found that LGBTQ people experienced eight times as many hate crimes as non-LGBTQ people.

LGBTQ people are socialized, like most people in society, to believe that being LGBTQ is wrong and to believe in stereotypical and stigmatizing ideas, such as that as an LGBTQ person they will never find happiness and a family who will love them.

As children and youth, LGBTQ individual often experience rejection and even violence by families of origin. Many are bullied at school, and some sent to so-called conversion therapies that teach them the very stereotypes and self-hatred that mental health professionals say they should learn to undo.

Evidence also shows that LGBTQ people are more likely to experience socioeconomic stress, including higher rates of poverty, housing instability, and food insecurity. Specific subpopulations, including transgender people, bisexuals, LGBTQ people of color, and older LGBTQ people, are especially vulnerable.

Transgender people have seen fewer positive social and legal changes in the past few decades than did sexual minority people and an increase in hostile public rhetoric in recent years.

Gender nonaffirmation is a particular stressor that affects the health outcomes of transgender individuals. Gender nonaffirmation refers to the denial of recognition of a transgender person's gender and, more globally, their dignity and humanity.

Gender-affirming treatment is one form of gender affirmation. Research has shown that transgender individuals who receive hormone therapy or surgical care that they needed had lower prevalence of one-year suicide attempt as compared with those who had not received the care they needed.

In summary, research shows that stigma, violence, and discrimination remain pervasive stressors for LGBTQ people. While same-sex marriages have become more accepted in American society, LGBTQ people still lack many nondiscrimination protections that would have been afforded them under the Equality Act. A lot more needs to be done to afford LGBTQ people equality and dignity and improve their health and well-being.

Thank you.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Thank you so much.

Mr. Lehman, you're now recognized for your testimony.
Mr. Lehman.

STATEMENT OF CHARLES FAIN LEHMAN, FELLOW, MANHATTAN INSTITUTE FOR POLICY RESEARCH CONTRIBUTING EDITOR, CITY JOURNAL

Mr. LEHMAN. Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to address you today.

Before I begin, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the members of the prior panel and their bravery in speaking out about the horrific violence perpetrated against them. Victims of hate crime deserve to be heard, and I applaud the committee for giving them this platform.

I am here today in my capacity as an analyst of crime, particularly hate crimes. Bias-motivating offending is a serious and pressing issue in the United States. Some 7,300 hate crimes were reported to the FBI in 2021, including nearly 1,400 offenses targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender individuals on the basis of their identity.

Due to community underreporting, the transition to the National Incident-Based Reporting System, varying definitions of hate crime by state, and well-established problems with the FBI's hate crime data in general, these figures are almost certainly a dramatic undercount.

Given this opportunity to address lawmakers, my priority is to advise you on how best to reduce the frequency of such offenses. In my limited time, therefore, I want to argue that the best way to combat hate crime is to engage it like other kinds of crime. Hate-based offenders are not specialists, and the traditional criminal justice system is an effective way to control hate crime.

Many people, sadly, bear some animus toward others on the basis of their identity, including toward LGBTQ people. But the number of people who bear animus is almost certainly much larger than the number of people who will commit a hate crime.

This is, I submit, because bias-motivated offending also requires the antisocial tendencies and lack of self-control which characterizes criminal offending generally. To commit a hate crime, it is not enough to hate. One must also feel entitled to act out that hate on another individual.

As a consequence, it is little surprise that hate crime offenders are not, as I say, specialists. They tend to offend in nonbias-motivated ways, too.

Arrest data recently released by the New York Division of Criminal Justice Services captures this phenomenon. While hate crime offenders vary demographically from other offenders, they have similar or more serious criminal histories across a variety of measures, from frequency of prior conviction to risk of rearrest following arraignment.

The tragedy which motivated today's hearing is a cardinal example. As has been widely reported, the Club Q shooter had previously been arrested for making violent threats against their own mother, an arrest that followed a, quote, "lengthy standoff."

That case was dismissed because the family declined to cooperate. But if prosecutors succeeded in eliciting that cooperation, five people might be alive today.

El Paso law enforcement also failed to subject the shooter to Colorado's red flag law, a sign that they did not see the risk the shooter posed to the community.

Saying hate offenders are like other offenders does not mean that hate crimes are not different from other crimes. Bias-motivated offending is uniquely toxic to the mutual tolerance which makes a free and democratic society possible. Americans have the freedom to disagree about issues which touch on matters of identity. Such disagreement is possible in no small part because we refuse to tolerate the acting out of animus in violence. Hate crime enhancements are a proportional response to the egregiousness of such offenses.

What the preceding does mean, though, is that the criminal justice system is the correct venue for reducing the frequency of bias-motivated offenses. This is particularly true as compared to approaches which aim to control hate crime by educating against or otherwise reducing bias.

To be sure, reducing bias is a laudable goal even if it remains an open question how to do so effectively. But at the population level, most people who hate will never convert their hate into a crime; meaning, the education produces little prevention per hour or dollar expended.

Rather, if the members of this committee want to more effectively combat hate crime, they should do so by supporting the criminal justice system. Increase funding for police hiring to remediate the decline in police employment per capita since the Great Recession. Better fund police investigations integral to clearing hate crime cases. Support state and local prosecutors in forming specialized hate crime bureaus, including by coordinating information sharing in the challenging area of hate crime prosecution. Increase Federal hate crime penalties and encourage the Department of Justice to pursue hate crime charges in states where local laws are insufficient, such as in New York state where the Buffalo grocery shooter cannot be executed for his heinous offense, a situation which also obtains in Colorado.

Hate crime against LGBTQ people and otherwise is a serious issue and we must take it seriously. Doing that means treating hate criminals like the criminals they are and bringing the full power of the justice system to bear on them.

Thank you for your time, and I welcome the committee's questions.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Thank you very much.

And thank you, Ms. Pocock. You are now recognized for your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF JESSIE POCOCK, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
& EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, INSIDE OUT YOUTH SERVICES**

Ms. POCOCK. Thank you, Chairwoman Maloney, Ranking Member Comer, and members of the committee.

My name is Dr. Pocock, she, her. It's the honor of my life to be the executive director and CEO of Inside Out Youth Services,

where, since 1990, we've built access, equity, and power with LGBTQIA2+ young people. I believe my job is one of the most joyful and, sadly, necessary work that exists.

Inside Out is the only LGBTQ-specific center in Colorado Springs. I don't know how many Inside Out alumni survived that night at Club Q, but I know there is at least one who didn't.

Let me remind us all, this is not OK. This is not normal. We all want what's best for our youth. We want them to be healthy and have opportunities to develop skills for meaningful and productive adulthood. We want them to feel loved and included in their schools, on the sports field, in their places of worship, at work, in their homes. We want them to survive.

I'd like to share the love and inclusion we see at our community center daily. Teens immediately welcome new youth to make sure they're included. Peer advisors refer struggling youth to our trusted staff who support them. We see a culture of asking for help, spreading kindness, using our food bank and free therapist. We see dancing and dinners, guitar lessons, crochet, Disney movies, Dungeons and Dragons.

We see trust, the single most protective factor that exists for youth. We see hope. Our walls are decorated with statements like, "Someone is so proud of you," and "I understand that I don't understand, but I stand for you."

Outside of our center, we see hate. A local school board member recently shared a meme that says, When you're transgender and you're pregnant, next to a picture of poop on an ultrasound screen.

It is not OK that we expect more maturity and compassion from our youth than the public servants entrusted with their care. Daily, our staff sit with youth experiencing suicidal thoughts who are impacted by these types of harmful and inaccurate messages.

It is not the fact these youth are LGBTQ that puts them at risk. It's the way our culture views them. Their mental health is impacted when politicians legislate away their rights, when they witness unmitigated hate speech on social media. This is not normal. This is not OK. These are kids.

And this is why, in addition to direct service, Inside Out advocates alongside youth for inclusive policies. Having one safe space is not enough. LGBTQ youth deserve a safe nation.

"Scared," since the shooting at Club Q, that word keeps coming up for me. Youth are asking us to be more incognito, less obviously LGBTQ. They're scared they'll be the next target. This isn't OK.

Let me remind us, those at Club Q were the ones who fought and saved lives.

We have funded police departments here, but we need police to enforce laws that prevent violence. Here is the truth: Politicians and pundits are spreading lies about LGBTQ+ people, falsely and dangerously stating that LGBTQ Americans are threats to children. This false rhetoric fuels hate and division, and it works.

Inside Out's community center is respected as a best practice model for youth development locally, statewide and nationally. We are not the predators. We are the ones saving the lives of those preyed on through hate and violence.

I implore you, start legislating the real problems—commercialized bigotry, racism, hatred, and mass murderers' access to

guns. But, even simpler, I implore you to treat us as humans. LGBTQ people are humans who have families, who love and, tragically, who bleed.

Before you post on social media, think about the youth who read your words. Words can harm, but words can spread compassion. Words can condemn those who speak and act out of hate. Even if you don't understand, we need you to stand for us.

My favorite note says, "We noticed when you were gone because we do." Notice who is gone: Ashley Paugh, Raymond Green Vance, Daniel Aston, Derek Rump, Kelly Loving. Notice whether your public service is in honor of their lives, or whether it is in service to the hate that contributed to their deaths. Notice who the real predators are and hold them accountable. Notice who is gone.

These young people deserve the very best of us. Stand for them, even when you don't understand. And, if you don't, come to our center in Colorado Springs. We've got a community of brilliant young people who will invite you in and help you learn.

Thank you.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Thank you very much.

And now, Mr. Wolf, you are now recognized. Mr. Wolf?

STATEMENT OF BRANDON WOLF, SURVIVOR OF PULSE NIGHTCLUB SHOOTING

Mr. WOLF. Thank you so much, Chair Maloney, and the committee for having me today.

You know, being LGBTQ in America in 2022 means looking over your shoulder before you hold hands with someone you love. It means watching your very humanity be litigated day in and day out on every cable news network and across every social media platform. It means wondering if today is the day that hate comes armed with a clenched fist, or worse, an AR-15. It means wondering if, today, your little slice of normal, the thing you told yourself you didn't deserve, comes to an end.

My day came on June 12, 2016. Pulse Nightclub was one of the first places I ever went that I didn't look over my shoulder, where I didn't stiffen my wrist or deepen my voice to avoid detection. And, that night, everything about Pulse Nightclub was normal. I went to the same bartender I always went to, ordered the same drinks I always ordered.

And, as the night wound to a close, I stepped into the same bathroom I'd been in hundreds of times before. There was a poster on the wall with the painted faces of drag queens I knew well. There was a half-empty cup teetering on the edge of the sink like it might fall off. The water from the faucet was ice cold that night.

There were gunshots, endless gunshots, the hair standing up on the back of my neck, the stench of blood and smoke burning the inside of my nose, the nervous huddle against a wall, a girl trying desperately, so hard not to scream. And I could feel her trembling on the tiles underneath us. There was a sprint for the exit, all atop this bang, bang, bang from an assault weapon.

A man filled with hate and armed with a Sig Sauer MCX charged into Pulse in my city of Orlando, an LGBTQ safe space, and murdered 49 of those we loved. My best friends, Drew and

Juan, took 19 of the over 110 rounds that man pumped into the club.

I'll never forget the thousands of desperate calls I placed to Drew, or his family's heartbroken screams when I had to tell them that their child would not be coming home.

And I can never unsee both of their lifeless bodies in cold, hard caskets.

For years, cynical politicians and greedy grifters have joined forces with right-wing extremists to pour gasoline on anti-LGBTQ hysteria and terrorize our community. My own Governor, Ron DeSantis, has trafficked in that bigotry to feed his insatiable political ambition and propel himself toward the White House.

We have been smeared and defamed. Hundreds of bills have been filed in order to erase us. Powerful figures have insisted that the greatest threats this country face are a teacher with they-them pronouns or someone in a wig reading Red Fish Blue Fish. And all along, we warned that these shortsighted political maneuvers would come with a human cost, but they've continued anyway.

Even as queer kids told us that they were scared, that life was getting less safe for them; even as hate violence has escalated; as children's hospitals have faced mounting bomb threats; as armed protesters started showing up at pride festivals and brunches; as a donut shop in Oklahoma was fire-bombed for daring to host a drag show; even as five innocent people in Colorado Springs went into a space that was supposed to be safe for them and came out in body bags, the attacks have continued.

We can be better than that. We have to be better than that. Right-wing extremism relies on this manufactured belief that its poison is inevitable, that resistance is hopeless. But I contend that taking a stand is necessary, that it is our duty.

We need to say without apology that people who endanger entire marginalized communities for social media content and fundraising fodder have no place in our politics. We need to hold accountable those who traffic in venomous bigotry to score cheap political points. We need to address how our obsession with easy access to guns takes dangerous hatred and makes it fatal. And we need to say unequivocally, right here, right now, that LGBTQ lives matter, that trans lives matter, and that, in this country, that is not up for debate.

Words have consequences. Unbridled hate comes at a cost. Our stolen loved ones are not a talking point. They're missing faces at birthday parties, empty seats at dinner tables. They paid the price for militarized hate in this country.

It is high time that Congress gets serious about the cost of anti-LGBTQ hatred and commit to honoring those in its crosshairs with real actions.

The simple truth is this: We just want to live. Is that so much to ask?

Chairwoman MALONEY. Thank you. The gentleman's time has expired.

I thank all the panelists.

I now recognize myself for five minutes for questions.

The violence that took place at Club Q follows years of long efforts by some state lawmakers to erase LGBTQ+ people from school

curriculum, limit their access to healthcare, and undermine their ability to fully participate in society.

Now, state lawmakers are not alone. There have been many actions here in Congress pushing the same kind of draconian extremist policies. For example, more than 30 House Republicans introduced their own version of Florida's "Don't Say Gay or Trans," end quote, law, which would restrict Federal funding for schools that include LGBTQI+ people in their curriculum.

I'd like to ask Ms. Robinson: How would a Federal policy suppressing, even mentioning of LGBTQI+ people in classrooms further undermine the ability of LGBTQI Americans to live authentically and safely? Ms. Robinson?

MS. ROBINSON. Thank you for the question. And it's so critically important. What we teach our kids matters. We're teaching curriculum that not only shows them who our history is and what we can be in the future, but also what we value, who matters, who deserves dignity and respect. If we erase LGBTQ+ people from the curriculum, it erases the value in our lives.

As Brandon said, this is our opportunity to be better, and we can do that. And it starts with how we educate our children.

And I also want to be clear that, when we allow these pieces of legislation to move forward that erase our communities, that dehumanize us, what it does is create a dangerous environment that does support and feed these seeds of hatred that exist in our world. It's not only dangerous; it's violent to our people.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Thank you.

MS. POCOCK, what would a Federal Don't Say Gay or Trans law mean for the LGBTQ1 youth navigating their identities and communities across the country from your experience?

MS. POCOCK. Yes. You know, we worked really hard on a similar Don't Say Gay bill in—that was being proposed in our—in our state. And, you know, the truth is that we all need mentors and examples that we can grow into and see ourselves in. And, when our—when we as a nation are hiding our faces or our experiences or our contributions to this nation, it really impacts young people and their ability to see others like them, and their ability to learn how we've contributed to this nation.

But, more than that, it's erasure, and it hurts. And so, our young people tell us that what they see and hear and feel when school board members or politicians are advocating to erase them is that they feel like they don't belong. They feel like their public schools are not for them.

And so, it is so critically important that we are always cheering these young people on. And one real simple way to do that is to give them access to folks like me and those of us on the panel who are LGBTQ and contributing, incredible human beings in this world, because they can be, too. They just need us to support them and show them how.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Thank you.

Following the enactment of Florida's Don't Say Gay or Trans law, anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric on social media surged by more than 400 percent, astonishingly.

Dr. Meyer, what is the relationship between this surge in anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric and the kind of violence that took place at Club Q last month? Turn on your—

Mr. MEYER. I think, as was mentioned already in the panel, this kind of incitement encourages people to enact what they think is righteous because of religious convictions and other types of ideologies that are portrayed in the—on social media, wrongly.

And clearly, this is creating an environment where such violence is seen as not only acceptable, but, as I said, righteous and desirable, and causing LGBT people a lot of harm not only in the actual—those of them who actually experience violence, but also everybody in the community who witnesses it.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Well, my time has expired, but, as Democrats—OK. I will come back at the end with more questions.

Well, as Democrats, we have pushed for policies to protect and advance the health, safety, and rights of LGBTQ people.

My time is up, and I will ask more questions on the second round, but now to Ms. Foxx.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Lehman, is crime increasing in America?

Mr. LEHMAN. It's hard to give a yes-or-no answer. I would say certain categories of crime, homicide, car theft, shootings, pretty uniformly over the past three years. Other categories of crime, plausibly over the past year is a question of how that compares to baseline. And, in certain cities, dramatically across the board.

So, broadly yes.

Ms. FOXX. Yes. Are there particular parts of America that are seeing larger increases in crime?

Mr. LEHMAN. I think, in general, crime is more common in large cities. I would debate the reason why. Some of it is concentration of population, but yes.

Ms. FOXX. OK. Do you have an idea of why crime is increasing faster in these areas?

Mr. LEHMAN. I think there are a couple of factors. There are, perhaps, just an easy answer many people are looking for. I don't think they're easy answers. Certainly, policy is not helping. Some of the—some of the—novelties jurisdictions have reduced police capacity or have increased restrictions on policing. That doesn't help the problem.

I do believe there is a longer-term issue with the capacity of our criminal justice system since the early days of 2020 across the board.

Certainly, in those areas, though, policies are not helping.

Ms. FOXX. So, for years, committee Democrats have called for the defunding of the police. Has that made for good policy, and has that reduced crime?

Mr. LEHMAN. I'll note that many jurisdictions have tried to defund the police and weren't successful because it is overwhelmingly unpopular. What I can say in the aggregate, certainly jurisdictions that move forward with reducing police funding are experiencing large increases in crime.

More generally, one of the few criminological findings that we have that's pretty overwhelming in its certainty is that more cops

reduce crime. So, all else equal, if you spend less on cops, you would expect crime to go up.

Mrs. FOXX. So, when—you just mentioned, when policing budgets are cut, there seems to be an increase in crime. You said more cops, less crime.

So, with that, when police budgets are cut, resulting in fewer officers patrolling the communities, then I think we could say the areas become less safe. Is that correct?

Mr. LEHMAN. All else equal, certainly.

Ms. FOXX. OK. So, in your writings, you've mentioned that America's streets are likely underpoliced. Can you explain a little more what you mean by that?

Mr. LEHMAN. Certainly, that draws in a couple of different references. One is good estimates of America's police—a police-to-population, rather, ratio relative to other developed nations, we underperform the rest of the OECD on this measure, or most of the rest of the OECD on this measure.

Another is that, for the amount of crime cost, the costs associated with level of crime that police would produce, the socially optimal—below the socially optimal level of spending on police, or a third one is that, across a variety of indicators, we have a lower police-per-capita ratio than we did—about 2008 was the peak, before the Great Recession, which suggests to me, given the rise in crime, that a stalling on the crime decline at that point, we could be buying more safety than we currently are.

Ms. FOXX. OK. I assume there is a connection between something you've written: Fewer cops also mean more police conduct.

Could you explain that phenomenon?

Mr. LEHMAN. Do you mean misconduct?

Ms. FOXX. Not—the—it says "conduct." It may be misconduct.

Mr. LEHMAN. I—I would assume misconduct. Yes. All else equal, I would expect that more—fewer cops mean more burden on the remaining cops. You would—there is a fixed quantity of crime. The fact of fewer cops means more crimes. The quantity of crime goes up, quantity of man-hours. There is a strong empirical relationship between stress, burden, overwork, and the risk that police officer will engage in use of force, that a police officer will be complained about or reported. Fewer cops put more strain.

Ms. FOXX. OK. And how could Congress help law enforcement personnel better fight crime, if—if there is a way other than putting more money in?

Mr. LEHMAN. Look, the first way is putting more money in, I—I regret to tell the Representative, which is—you know, policing America is highly local. Congress has basically three things it can do. The Federal Government has three things it could do.

Thing one is spend money. Thing two is coordinate information sharing, encourage the sharing of expertise and best practices. Thing three is fix data and data sharing. As I talked about briefly, the FBI's hate crime reporting is a mess. This is substantive of the fact that all crime reporting in Americas is a massive mess. I'm happy to talk about this later. But it's a huge issue for getting things done in crime preventions generally and hate crime prevention specifically.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you, Madam Chair. I yield back.

Mr. LYNCH. [Presiding.] The chair now recognizes the gentlewoman from Ohio, Ms. Brown, for five minutes.

Ms. BROWN. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd first like to start off by thanking the chairwoman for holding this hearing and for her tireless commitment to advancing civil rights for the LGBTQ+ community and her long, remarkable career. And just like to go on the record and say that she will be missed.

On the topic that brings us here today, I was heartbroken and stunned by the tragedy in Colorado Springs at Club Q. Political violence and hatred targeted at the LGBTQ+ community is completely unacceptable, and I want to thank the brave survivors for testifying today and for sharing their story.

This important hearing ensures that the LGBTQ+ voices are being heard, and that we are properly addressing the surge of anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-trans hate.

So, I'd like to start off with Ms. Hunt.

Why do you think anti-LGBTQ hate has seen such a resurgence in the political climate in recent months? Is it connected to the midterms election, is this a broader trend, or both?

Ms. HUNT. Thank you for that question.

It is, unfortunately, a trend that we've seen over the past six years of trans people increasingly being seen as an acceptable target. It began in 2016 with the introduction of HB2, the first of the major bathroom bills in North Carolina. That was the first major piece of state legislation directly targeting trans people and trans people's lives.

And that has kicked off a trend that has seen just an increased selection of trans people in particular as being an acceptable target for political attacks, for trying to score points and move the needle a little bit without any negative consequence, because we're just seen as an acceptable target to so many people. And the dehumanizing rhetoric that comes up, and that fuels the wave of violence that we're seeing is inflamed by this treatment of us as an other, an acceptable target. And that is a really disturbing and unsettling trend to see as part of our political landscape.

Ms. BROWN. Well, I appreciate your candor, and hope that we can all recognize how the anti-LGBTQ hate is being weaponized, unfortunately, by the extreme right for purposes none other than to stoke fear and energize a backlash.

With that, Dr. Meyer, we have seen the extreme right use its most powerful tool, right-wing media, in an effort to spread the message of hate. How has right-wing media contributed to the rise of anti-LGBTQ hate, specifically against trans people and their ability to live their authentic lives as themselves?

Mr. MEYER. Well, to tell you the truth, I do not understand why, as Ms. Hunt just mentioned, transgender people have become such a target. We know that in most jurisdictions, there is more minority of the people. So, a lot of the hate that comes this way, I have to assume is an excuse, as was mentioned here already, and maybe to serve some political purposes that are—seem to be—that seems to be an expedient way to achieve by attacking transgender people.

The—the—the way that rhetoric has developed over the past few years has been really concerning. And some of the things that I

find really disturbing is the way this rhetoric has talked about they want to protect children from being sexualized while that very notion, that talking about having gay parents or talking about transgender people is sexualizing, is completely wrong, has nothing to do with sex any more than if you talk about a person having a mother and a father.

So, the purpose of this rhetoric is completely political, I think.

Ms. BROWN. Thank you for that, Dr. Meyer.

Are you aware of the extreme right targeting these anti-LGBTQ messages at minority communities, and the African-American community in particular?

Mr. MEYER. Well, of course, as I mentioned, homophobia and transphobia are embedded in American culture and history, as is racism, and the two combined create this environment where attacking LGBT people of color and especially transgender women of color are a huge target of hate.

Ms. BROWN. Thank you.

And, with that, I see my time has expired.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentlelady yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Georgia, Mr. Hice, for five minutes.

Mr. HICE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And if I could take just 30 seconds, a point of personal privilege, before I get started as this is my last full committee hearing of my congressional career. And I just want to say thank you to each of my colleagues. We've had a lot of spirited debates over the years, and it's been an honor to be a part of this.

I wish Chairwoman Maloney was still here. I want to wish her the best as she goes on from here, and also soon-to-be Chairman Comer, wishing him the best as well as he takes the reins of this committee in the next Congress.

But I just say God bless each of you, and it's been an honor to be here and to serve with you. And I thank you for giving me a little time to say that.

We are hearing a lot about right-wing extremism and violence. Obviously, violence of any type is a poison, as is left-wing violence, and that which is the fuel that is thrown on the fire by left-wing media. This is not a one-sided argument. It goes on both sides, and it needs to be dealt with on both sides.

What happened at Club Q is a tragedy that should never, ever, ever happen in the United States, and I do want to commend the brave actions of U.S. Army veteran Richard Fierro for his quick actions that saved the lives of who knows how many other additional individuals who were in harm's way.

But that said, I think it's a shame that, once again, here we are in this committee—as the majority is heading out the door, this committee's responsibility to deal with Federal Government oversight continues to be ignored. We are dealing with things that this committee has not dealt with in this country, be it inflation or energy or border or the Afghanistan withdrawal, and a host of other things that this committee continues to ignore. And I think that's a shame.

And today's hearing is but an attempt to blame Republicans for the horrendous acts of violence. And at the same time, many of my colleagues ignore many of the words and deeds from members of their own party that have fueled hate and violence, statements on anti-Semitism. We have major Democratic leaders who, quote, "tell them, members of the Trump administration, that they're not welcome anymore anywhere." These types of comments should not be allowed either.

Look, the rise of hate crimes deeply concerns me. It concerns all of us. There is no question about this. It's a tragedy that we need to deal with. The reality is we're all human beings. We're all created equal in the sight of God, and we need to honor that.

I have here an article, and some of you may have heard this type of comment, and it's just shocking to hear this type of thing. But the comments of saying, You're all trash. I hate you, and I wish you harm.

Some of you probably have heard that, those type of comments. But this comment was not made to the LGBTQ community. This came out last week, comments directed to a group of Christians. It's unacceptable.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to submit this article for the record, if I could, please, sir.

Mr. LYNCH. Without objection.

Mr. HICE. Thank you.

And I—just down the street last week, some individuals were not allowed to enter a restaurant because of who they were. Again, this was not the LGB community. Once again, this was a group of Christians—refused to be served in a restaurant because they were a group of Christians. It's unacceptable.

Again, I'd like to have the article submitted to the record, please, sir.

Mr. LYNCH. Without objection, so ordered.

Mr. HICE. Thank you.

You want to talk about hate between May and October of this year. Over 100—just within those few short months, over 100 pro-life organizations and churches were vandalized, attacked, smashed, 38 of them churches across the country—fire-bombed, smashed, vandalized, pro-abortion graffiti and threatening messages left.

This type of stuff has got to stop on both sides.

Again, I'd like to submit this to the record, if I could, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. LYNCH. Without objection, so ordered.

Mr. HICE. We have a Department of Justice who has come out admitting that they are—have raised investigations against pro-life individuals and pro-life organizations simply because they don't like it.

Again, I'd like to have it submitted to the record.

Mr. LYNCH. Without objection.

Mr. HICE. You know, and—and, by the way, dozens of those churches that were vandalized and fire-bombed and so forth were by the organization, Jane's Revenge, who admitted that they did so. To this day, not a single arrest.

So, we've got to deal with these type of issues across the board. And, you know, I urge my Democratic colleagues to join us not only with what's happening here, but the hate that's coming against churches, against pro-life organizations, the Supreme Court Justices, for crying out loud, supporters of President Trump. All of this needs to be dealt with. It is systematic and highlights a moral and spiritual problem in this country, and we need to admit that this is not a one-sided issue. It's on both sides of the aisle.

And, with that, I thank you for indulging me.

And, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentlewoman from Michigan, Ms. Tlaib, for five minutes.

Ms. TLAIB. Thank you so much, Chairman.

And I do want to recognize Chairwoman Maloney. She could have had a hearing on anything, and being that her last hearing as the chair, and she made this a priority, and I want to commend her on that. I appreciate it so much.

I want to start with many—start with the truth, because I think—I don't know if it was Mr. Haynes or Mr. Slauch that said this, but it's about starting to live our truths. So, I want to start with my truth as a Congress Member here.

One of the things I've realized many of my colleagues ignore is that nearly 20 percent of all hate crimes are now motivated by LGBTQ+ bigotry in our country. You know, we continue to see report after report. The one report that, you know, even hearing in my own community is of teachers being allies, being targeted, even—not only at school board meetings, but just publicly through social media. Displays of different kinds of solidarity targeted, just because they want to make sure that every single child that they're educating is seen and heard and that they feel safe.

Students and residents who continue to speak up in my community about, you know, the attempt to so-called make it about books and all of those things that's happening right in our backyard in my district, it is incredibly important to realize what has happened, the dehumanization that happens after those hearings.

Please know that many of my LGBTQ+ neighbors who testified literally are targeted on social media, hate expressed through videos, through Twitter, and so much other outlets. And it's so hard, because I watched as, one by one, they testified and how they were literally just shouted at, tried to be silenced.

So, when I hear the story of what happened at Pulse, it's horrific, just God awful to watch a friend, a colleague die solely based because of who they are.

And, you know, Mr. Wolf, I want to thank you so much, because it takes so much bravery to come here, because I know what's going to happen when you leave. And that's the part that doesn't get discussed.

When you leave, you're going to get literally thrown, of course, some love and support from many folks that see your bravery as inspiring and are grateful for you. But I know what also comes your way when you come and speak the truth here.

One of the things that I think Mr. Haynes and Mr. Slauch and Mr. Anderson—I think one of them said—I think it was Mr. Ander-

son—living your truth. But I think Mr. Haynes or Slauch said, “What are we doing to make LGBTQ community unsafe in this Chamber?” And it’s something that I wish we did more of here.

But, Mr. Wolf, your experience—awful, awful, traumatic experience at Pulse, you know, what does it really truly mean for the LGBTQ+ community in our country and the allies, because that—that is something that I want to talk about even more, because it’s not only our LGBTQ+ neighbors, but it’s—it’s the folks that are standing, deciding silence is not an option, to wrap our arms around our LGBTQ+ community, that are now continuing to be targeted?

Mr. WOLF. Thank you so much, and thanks for recognizing how hard it is to do this day in and day out.

A moment like Pulse changes a community forever, and it doesn’t just change the people who were there. It doesn’t just change the people who had to bury their children years too soon. It doesn’t just change the community that was targeted. It changes the entire community. Central Florida is not the same as it was on June 11, 2016. Our entire city of Orlando has changed, in part, because we were forced to make a choice.

You see, terrorism is designed to terrorize people. That’s the point. It’s supposed to scare us back into the closet, to challenge us to stop living authentically. And so, our city, our region, faced a choice in the hours after the shooting. And that choice was whether or not we were going to succumb to terrorism and hate, whether we were going to allow one man armed with an assault weapon and hundreds of rounds of ammunition to shatter us, or if we were going to stand more closely together.

I was most inspired in the wake of Pulse by watching people from both sides of the political aisle come together to say that we can be better, that we can do more for LGBTQ people in our—in our community. I was inspired by faith leaders standing alongside LGBTQ elected officials and saying, “We may not always agree, but we can agree on the fact that people are deserving of dignity and respect.”

Communities face a choice in that moment. I’m proud of my community for deciding that we would be a different, more inclusive, safer, better community moving forward. And I also think that offers a blueprint for how this country moves forward in the wake of such violence and hate.

Ms. TLAI. I just want all my LGBTQ+ neighbors in my district and throughout the country just to know, because of you, I believe our communities are better and more beautiful.

Thank you again for your courageous testimony, for many of you, and just know that you will always have an ally in the U.S. Congress.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentlelady yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Wisconsin, Mr. Grothman, for five minutes.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Well, I’d like to—I wish she was here. I want to say an—you know, say wonderful things about her, and she ducked out.

I’m glad we’re having a hearing here dealing with crime. My district is adjacent to the city of Milwaukee, which in the last three

years, has more than doubled the number of murders. I don't know what the definition of "hate" means, but I want to say normally, if you're killing somebody, you probably hate them. I suppose there are just some people who shoot into a crowd or whatever.

And I've always felt there were three things causing Milwaukee, which used to be the safest of the 25 biggest cities in this country, become such a dangerous city. And I think, one, if we look at the type of people committing the crimes, the breakdown of the family. And of course, we have people here who have stood with Black Lives Matter who initially was opposed to that.

Second, we have the police hatred. I think that's even more than the police defunding, but this police hatred, where police have to be so careful about what they do. And, as the result, they become passive policemen. I mean, that's one of the reasons why, not just in Milwaukee, but around the world—around the country, we've seen an increase in the number of murders.

I guess a distant third would—may be open borders. I noticed last month by itself, we had—we broke the previous record for the number of what they call got-aways at the southern border, going from 59,000 to 73,000. And obviously we have people who won't even turn themselves in to the Border Patrol and go through asking for asylum. You know, you're collecting people who are potentially dangerous.

And as the result, we've gone—and I assume some of the—this year, I think we've had 212 murders. I assume some were gay. I don't know.

But I'm going to ask Mr. Lehman: Am I right in each one of those three reasons for the huge increase in murders in this country, and is there anything you think we can do to deal with these three problems?

Mr. LEHMAN. Yes. You know, I think—I think, locally, to the two-year increase in homicide, the second thing that you mentioned, the increase in passivity among police officers—you can call it what you want. You can call it criticism of police. Can you call it a blue strike.

The reality is, across a variety of measures, police are less active than they used to be. Lawmakers have been very forceful in restricting police activity—bans on chokeholds, bans on police chases. I won't get into the merits of those policies. You know, I think the—the breakdown of the family is a long-standing problem.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Could you elaborate on that? I mean, I never think we talk about it enough here. What are you talking about?

Mr. LEHMAN. On the breakdown of the family is a long-standing problem?

Mr. GROTHMAN. Yes.

Mr. LEHMAN. Yes. Forty percent of American children born to—40 percent of American children today live in a—were born out of wedlock. Many children will be—go through a divorce—not really asking how many. Of course, their parents' lifetime, marriage grows rarer and rarer. Fewer children have access to the stability of a loving, two-parent household, regardless of the sex of the parents.

The—that almost certainly contributes to—

Mr. GROTHMAN. Can you give us some statistics on that?

Mr. LEHMAN. On which fact? On which number?

Mr. GROTHMAN. I mean, there are wonderful parents, and there are wonderful people, including in this room, who have come all sorts—out of all sorts of backgrounds. But when I look at Milwaukee of, say, 1970 and Milwaukee of 2022, the change in the family situation, when I look at the—

Mr. LEHMAN. I—I don't know the risk ratios, the exact numbers off the top of my head. I can tell you that risks for criminality are higher. Risks for all sorts of antisocial outcomes are higher. Risks for individual—for harms to the individual are higher, risks for suicidality, risks for depression, all associated with particularly family breakdown. I think it's accurate.

And again, I think it's a long-standing problem. Clearly—clearly, we've had a crime decline—a crime decline in spite of the decline of the family, but it is a contributor.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Yes, but, when I look at this guy in Colorado Springs, I mean, he sure had a very difficult background, and obviously a horrible person, but if we're looking at the root causes of stuff.

How would you—given we've had this huge skyrocketing increase, how would you deal with that? Can you give us some ideas how society can get that 210 murders in Milwaukee back down to 40 or 50, which is still way too high?

Mr. LEHMAN. Sure. Look, we—we know what the tools—we know the tools that work. It's not that hard. Tool one needs incapacitation. The kinds of offenses that increased in 2020 concentrated among serious repeat violent offenders, people who commit homicides, people who engage in cycles or attributive violence, put them in prison. Incapacitation is really efficient.

Pointing to the second—and I've alluded to this several times—we have far fewer police officers per capita than we did before the Great Recession. We have something like 50-to 80,000 more police officers to get back up to capacity. I think that should be a top priority at all levels of government.

Mr. GROTHMAN. It always bothers me when—I mean, you're here. You're our guest. I love it. It always bothers me when you—when we talk about crime and people in your position just take the easy path to more cops. We should talk about more of some of the root causes, too, in the future, but thanks.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes himself for five minutes for questions.

I have the honor of representing the city of Boston along with Congresswoman Pressley. And, last month, Boston Children Hospital—Children's Hospital, the most renowned pediatric hospital in the country, received its fifth bomb threat in the last four months.

Since August of this year, the hospital has been subjected to an onslaught of online hate and harassment, including vitriolic emails and death threats against clinicians and other staff at Boston Children's Hospital. And many of these attacks have been driven by anti-LGBTQ+ social media accounts that have spewed hate and misinformation surrounding transgender care.

And as detailed by HRC, the Human Rights Campaign, in its report online, harassment last month—harassment report released

last month, the coordinated campaign against Boston Children's Hospital is not isolated.

Following its review of multiple social media platforms, HRC identified 24 different hospitals and providers across 21 states that have recently been subjected to direct online attacks following misleading, inflammatory, and harassing posts by anti-LGBTQ+ accounts.

Ms. Robinson, can you please expand on the nature of these coordinated hate campaigns against hospitals and other medical providers and their relationship to actual threats—physical threats against those individuals and institutions?

Ms. ROBINSON. This is a devastating reality that we're living in right now, where the people that we go to to offer support to our kids are being uniquely and targetly attacked. And I'm talking specifically about teachers in most cases, and also providers as we're talking about here.

And yes, our reports show that 24 different hospitals and providers across 22 states were directly attacked online following harassing, inflammatory, and misleading posts. I think the thing to really note here is that there is a direct connection. Hateful speech, extremist rhetoric is connected to real-life violence. We're seeing it play out time and time again, and we have to interrupt the cycle.

Mr. LYNCH. And again, at Boston's Children's Hospital, these online attacks and real-world threats have continued to take a devastating toll on hospital staff, not to mention the impact it has on LGBTQ individuals and their families, their moms and dads.

You know, there has already been extreme stress and pandemic-related pressures on these hospital staff. They've also—this trend has also affected patient care and safety.

Ms. Robinson, am I correct in stating that many hospitals and providers have been forced to remove online resources and websites in the wake of these attacks?

Ms. ROBINSON. Yes, you are correct.

Mr. LYNCH. HRC includes numerous examples in their report of the hateful social media posts that were involved in these harassment campaigns. As underscored in the report, all of the tweets and Facebook posts cited had remained live as of the date of writing, so they had not been removed, quote, "despite all of them being in violation of Twitter and Meta's policies on abusive behavior, and targeted harassment, and hateful conduct."

So, Ms. Robinson, what additional steps do you think social media companies can take to address this online harassment, and hopefully reduce the threat of, you know, real-world violence against LGBTQ persons, and also, these institutions that are trying to deliver healthcare to those individuals?

Ms. ROBINSON. You know, it is urgent and imperative that every social media company hold themselves accountable to their own community guidelines of behavior. People are being allowed to express views that are directly dangerous to our community, talking about moving forward brutal attacks, criminalizing our people, trying to make us seem like we are less than human.

This is a real threat. So, our first call is on social media companies to enact their own policies. But we also have to hold the bad actors accountable. In places like Florida, where we saw a 400 per-

cent increase in anti-LGBTQ hate speech and rhetoric, it is all fueled by 10 people. Ten actors were doing the majority of that. We have to hold one another accountable.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you.

My time has expired.

The chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania, Mr. Keller, for five minutes.

Mr. KELLER. Thank you, Chairman.

And I would like to thank the witnesses for being here today. I just want to make the point that any crime against any individual is unacceptable and should not be tolerated.

America's a nation of law and order. And, as I mentioned, any form of violence and lawlessness in this country is not acceptable. And those who perpetrate it must be held responsible under the full weight of the law.

I'm often reminded, President Reagan, who I thought was a great leader, said something, and I think we need to—we need to make sure we understand this. We must reject the idea that, every time a law is broken, society's guilty rather than the law breaker. It is time to restore the American precept that each individual is accountable for his actions.

And we need to make sure we hold people accountable when they break the law.

And it's undeniable that crime in major cities across the country is rising. According to the Major City Chiefs—Cities Chiefs Association, homicides and aggravated assaults are up 50 percent and 36 percent respectively compared to 2019.

This is an alarming trend that demands this committee's full attention. So, we need to focus on that rather than trying to divide crime and talk about one—whoever a crime is committed against, we need to defend those people. We need to stand up for them, and we need to let them know that we love them, that we're not going to tolerate them being treated poorly.

But we should not be blaming one another. We should be blaming the people that commit these crimes. And we should not politicize any specific acts of evil, and we need to be looking at this holistically as an American crime crisis.

And actually, Mr. Lehman, I was—heard your testimony, and you had mentioned that some of the crimes that were committed—that were discussed were committed by people that had committed crimes previously. Is that—is that—did I understand that correctly in your testimony?

Mr. LEHMAN. Yes. And, just to—just to draw out those figures, which are available in my testimony, among individuals who commit—who were arrested for hate crime in New York state, 2019 to 2021, 52 percent had a prior conviction; 30 percent—32 percent had a prior felony conviction; 36 percent had an open case, a pending case; 20 percent were rearrested within six months of release.

So—so a large—a significant proportion of hate crime offenders, similar to the non-hate crime offending population have prior criminal histories and have a tendency toward criminal behavior.

Mr. KELLER. OK. So, it's not just a matter—I guess my question would be: It's not just a matter of making sure that our law enforcement is sufficient and has the tools they need to keep our com-

munities safe, but then I look at some of the district attorneys, and I'll look at Philadelphia in my home state of Pennsylvania. And we have a district attorney, Krasner, who does not prosecute some of these crimes.

What impact does that have when you have—when you have police officers enforcing the law and arresting the people that are perpetrating crime against citizens, and then the district attorney does not prosecute them, or they're not—they don't have sufficient bail? What does that do to—

Mr. LEHMAN. Well—

Mr. KELLER [continuing]. Security in America?

Mr. LEHMAN [continuing]. I'll talk specifically about hate crime. And, you know, there is frequently an overlap between hate crime and petty crime. In many jurisdictions, if I spray paint a swastika, I can be arrested for a hate crime and charged with it.

And a prosecutor who is committed to not charging misdemeanor or petty felony offenses might dismiss that offense, and I suspect that downstream of that behavior—a downstream of that behavior is more serious, aggravated offending. So that is to mean indicative of one of the failures of—you know, one of the risks associated with failing to charge petty crime.

There is a lot of variation in what progressive prosecutors do. Some of the progressive prosecutors in New York City have worked really hard to make prosecuting hate crimes a majority priority, and I applaud them for that. But I think, in general, people who commit small crimes often go on to commit large crimes, and you want to stop them while they're small.

Mr. KELLER. Yes. I think, if you take care of the little things, the bigger things go away. And, if people know they are going to be held accountable for what they do, and they're responsible for their actions, we won't see people doing things that harm other individuals. And that's—I think we need to be united in that message, and we need to stop making excuses.

I mean, I heard about, you know, the family and everything else. My parents were divorced when I was 12 years old. I went to live with my grandmother, OK? We never used being poor. We never used our family situation as an excuse, because we live in America. And in America, it doesn't matter who you are or where you live or who you love, it matters that you can attain great things.

But what we need to do is go back to that quote from President Reagan that I mentioned, and we need to restore that American precept that people are accountable for their own actions. And we need to give law enforcement the tools they need, and then we need to hold people that break the law accountable, because I don't want to see anybody get hurt in America. And, if somebody is hurt, the person that did it needs to be held accountable, so it doesn't happen again.

Thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentlewoman from Massachusetts, Ms. Pressley, for five minutes.

OK. We'll try to pick her—pick up that later.

The chair now recognizes the gentlewoman from Illinois, Ms. Kelly, for five minutes.

Ms. KELLY. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And I, too, wanted to thank Chairwoman Maloney for all of her work on this committee and wish her the best in her next chapter. And I also wanted to thank Ranking Member Hice for all the work that he's done and as he moves on to his next chapter.

You know, it's interesting being here today when, yesterday, we were celebrating because of the legislation that was passed. And now we are here today talking about a topic that's so very sad, and we're also talking about it on the day that 20-something people were killed in Newtown, you know, so—around the issue of guns.

And I do agree with my colleague from Wisconsin. When we talk about crime, we need to get to the root causes. You know, we can—and I'm a big gun violence prevention person, and I'm for the legislation, but we can talk about the legislation, but unless we do something around prevention and investing in all kinds of communities and all kind of people, and especially all kind of young people, we're going to find ourselves in the same place.

So, I want to also thank all the witnesses.

The LGBTQI+ people across this country have historically experienced health and economic inequities, largely rooted in wrongful discrimination against them in medical settings and employment. For example, men who have sex with men continue to face discrimination in healthcare settings because of stigma against HIV that has persisted for four decades. This stigma is damaging and humiliating.

According to a 2021 study from the Kaiser Family Foundation, LGBT people are more likely to report negative experiences with healthcare providers, including being blamed for their own illnesses and negative health outcomes.

An analysis from the Center for American Progress shows that almost 10 percent of the LGBTQ people report being turned away from healthcare facilities because of provider discomfort.

Dr. Meyer, can you explain how discrimination against LGBTQI+ people in healthcare settings leads to long-term negative health outcomes?

Mr. MEYER. Thank you. Yes.

As I presented in my written testimony, there has been research on the effect of prejudice and discrimination on LGBT people. It has been done for decades, recognized by both administrations, Health and Human Services, by the Academy of Sciences. So, this is not just me representing my research.

And what we have seen also, before I get to the effect of those types of attitudes, that violence, disrespect, bullying for youth is a very common experience for LGBT people.

If I may, there has been an equivalency made here in this hearing between attacks on the LGBTQ people and, of course, horrible attacks on Christians or other people who are attacked violently. But they're not equivalent. Not to say that one is better or worse than the other. But, when you're attacking a group of people, in a sense, that is embedding and reverberating hatred and stigma that has been going on for decades and are part, as you said just now, of the American system, you are creating a damage that is above and beyond just the attack that the person experiences, and it

brings back attacks that they had experienced throughout their whole lives.

Being Christian is not a stigmatized position in American society. It is very valued, and it's a good thing. But to be attacked for being Christian has a different nature, again, not that I am supporting any attack or any discrimination.

And what we have seen, that these types of attacks, this kind of discrimination, these kinds of bullying, they all have impact on LGBT people in—especially in mental health, depression, anxiety, and the very high rates of suicide ideation and suicide attempts that we see, both in older generations and in younger people who are LGBT.

Ms. KELLY. Not to cut you off. My time is running out. And also, it's even worse for people of color.

Mr. MEYER. Of course, as I mentioned in my testimony.

Ms. KELLY. My time is running out. I just wanted to say to Mr. Wolf, it is so wonderful to see you again. And I just appreciate your advocacy so much. You came and spoke to a group for me in Chicago. And I have a niece that belongs to the community, and I'm just so glad that there's advocates out there. And I'm a big ally, as Rashida Tlaib said also, and will always be here when you need me.

Thank you.

Mr. WOLF. Thank you. I appreciate that.

Chairwoman MALONEY. [Presiding.] The gentlewoman from New Mexico, Ms. Herrell, is recognized for five minutes.

Ms. HERRELL. Thank you, Madam Chair. And thank you for serving, and I wish you the best of luck. And this is, of course, our last meeting together, and I just thank you for your leadership. And I also thank you for hosting this hearing.

And my deepest condolences, obviously, to the first panel that was here in regard to the recent shooting in Florida. The targeted attacks remind us, unfortunately, of a cruel reality, is that we live in a nation that now faces threats from evil people. And this is unfathomable. It happens all the time.

And while I appreciate what Dr. Meyer just said, I disagree, because I think any attack on any group of people, regardless if it's a religious group—because I would point out that there have been over 280 murders against our law enforcement family. And how does that differ from, for instance, a religious group or an LGBTQ group? I just think any kind of evil attack on any group of people should be stopped in this country. There is no room for it.

And, sadly, it's happening both sides of the aisle. I mean, I've heard, and we all have over the last hour or so that it's right wing, right wing. You know what? It's left wing, too. It's an ability for people in power to not stand up for what is right, for our moral values, and for what the people of this country expect us to do.

And I'll cite an example, because it comes from both sides. After the shooting in Colorado, Speaker Pelosi, and I quote: "Right-wing extremists target transgender Americans' most fundamental rights and freedoms. Whether spouting dangerous rhetoric from cable news desks or openly bullying schoolchildren from the halls of power, MAGA Republicans are cruelly undermining the safety and well-being of our transgender community." End of quote.

That's not based on science. That's based on pushing the American people further apart and making everything more divisive. Because everyone on this side of the aisle who spoke today has truly said they hate to see this crime against any, any group of people in this country. And when we offered condolences to those who have suffered through the tragedy, we were faced with searing criticism.

The violent rhetoric translating into violent actions, it's not merely a concept, it is a real reality. And, sadly, you know what? We could fill this entire committee hearing for the rest of the year into 118, the new committee, we could have hearings against violence against judges, clubs, abortion clinics, hospitals, schools, grocery stores, business owners, malls, law enforcement, because we've allowed the media and social media platforms to drive the narrative instead of having real conversations right here in these committee rooms where we can come together and find solutions that protect all Americans.

Every single American deserves to live in a country where they can live in a society that affords them every level of security. We cannot accept the violence as an approach to solving problems that we face each and every day or demonize each other as an excuse not to engage with those that we disagree with.

And I urge my colleagues, let's stop shifting the blame and instead work together to build an America that truly lives up to its promises of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for everybody.

And I want to just followup on a question that came up. Ms. Pocock brought something up and I want to ask Mr. Lehman. She said we need to notice who the real perpetrators are or predators are, and hold them accountable.

Are we holding these predators accountable when crimes of hate are committed against any group of people?

Mr. LEHMAN. Abstractly, yes. Not in every case. There's a wide variety of things that count as hate crimes. I certainly think that you could devote more time, resources, energy, competency toward the swift and effective prosecution of hate crimes.

Ms. HERRELL. OK. And, again, I think this hearing is important. But I think at the end of the day what we have to do, let's everybody identify as Americans first. Then we can figure out the way to solve these problems. But if we don't come together in a transparent manner and work to protect everybody, including law enforcement, the men and women that stand in a thin blue line, and those that are willing to stand up for our values, then we're in more trouble than I thought.

And with that, Mrs. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The lady yields back.

The gentlelady from the District of Columbia, Ms. Norton, is recognized.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you, Madam Chair, for this important hearing.

Let me note at the beginning that the rights of LGBTQ District of Columbia residents are particularly at risk with House Republicans in the majority. Republicans have consistently tried to overturn D.C. local laws protecting this community, the LGBTQI community, including trying to overturn D.C.'s marriage equality law,

blocking D.C.'s domestic partner law, and allowing religiously affiliated schools in D.C. to discriminate against LGBT students.

Statehood, of course, is the only way to ensure D.C.'s laws are not undemocratically overturned.

So, I'm proud that since Democrats took the House four years ago, we have advanced critical legislation to protect and expand the rights of the LGBT community to live their own authentic lives. That's why, Ms. Robinson, the House passed the Equality Act last year to codify protections for the LGBT community against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. I was original cosponsor of the Equality Act.

So, my question for you, Ms. Robinson, is how would the Equality Act enshrine protections for this community, for LGBTQI+ individuals across the country?

Ms. ROBINSON. Right now, LGBTQ+ people are living with a patchwork of protections across the country. There are 29 states that do not have nondiscrimination against our community laws in place.

And so, yes, we identify as full Americans, but America is not giving us all of the rights that we deserve.

Passing that law in D.C. was critical, and as a resident, it was meaningful for me and for my family. It's essential that we pass these types of laws all across the country and put the Federal Equality Act into place.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you, Ms. Robinson.

Mr. Wolf, what does the Equality Act mean for the LGBTQI+ community and communities across the country?

Mr. WOLF. Thank you for the question.

You know, as Kelley said, it's important because we are not afforded the same nondiscrimination protections that other groups are. I say this as a person in the state of Florida.

One of the things that we've worked on—I work for Equality Florida, the state's LGBTQ civil rights organization—one of the things we've been working on for years is implementing comprehensive nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ people in our state.

So, what does that mean? It means protecting LGBTQ people from being denied housing, for instance, because we have a boyfriend not a girlfriend. It means protecting LGBTQ people from being fired from their jobs because they have a picture of their spouse on the desk.

And so, the Equality Act would, in ways that Florida has refused to do and other states have refused to do, would apply those nondiscrimination protections across the country.

And I'll expand just a little bit to say that that goes beyond the LGBTQ community, that there are other marginalized communities that are further protected under the Equality Act. And it goes beyond just housing, public accommodations, and work force, it goes into credit and other things like that, essentially saying that LGBTQ people, like every other American, deserve to be treated with dignity and respect and we deserve to be protected from discrimination.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you, Mr. Wolf.

Ms. Pocock, in June this committee favorably reported the LGBTQ+ Data Inclusion Act to the full House, which passed historic legislation in commemoration of Pride Month. I was an original cosponsor of that bill.

This bill would expand the collection of voluntary, self-disclosed information regarding sexual orientation. It would help to ensure policymakers can make better—can better understand the specific challenges that this community faces.

So, Ms. Pocock, what kinds of specific challenges do the LGBTQI+ people who you serve in your community face in the areas of healthcare, housing, and education?

Ms. POCOCK. Thank you for asking that question.

You know, we see double, sometimes triple the rate of suicide risk, school truancy, lack of care. I had one 13-year-old show up at our center who was living on the streets because it was safer than home. About a third of our young people experience homelessness.

So, it's so important to track data so that, one, we know how well we're doing for these young people; and two, so we can prevent the things that they're facing.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentlelady's time has expired.

Mr. Cloud is now recognized.

Mr. Cloud.

Mr. CLOUD. Thank you, Madam Chair.

And thank you, Ms. Pocock, for staying online. I know you're not in the room. We haven't forgotten you're there. Appreciate you being here.

I was curious to get your thoughts just really on, in the context of this conversation we're having today, what the role of the traditional nuclear family is in society today, what your take is on that.

Ms. POCOCK. Thank you for having me. I recently had a surgery and so I'm not able to fly, so just I really appreciate the opportunity to testify virtually.

So, you know, what I can tell you is that research shows that young people who are connected with trusted adults, whether it be parents—in fact, just one trusted adult reduces the risk of suicide by five times.

So, the reality is family structure is important and those of us in this community know that we have family structures in which our children are very taken care of, have great health outcomes, similar to others who might be in different structured households.

But the truth is, anyone can be a trusted adult and impact the outcomes for young people. And so that's why we're constantly educated—educating the community, be the trusted adult for the young person.

No matter where you are, you could be a teacher, you could be a neighbor, if that young person trusts you, they can come to you with a difficult problem they're facing and that will reduce their risks.

Mr. CLOUD. Do you believe that parents have a right to be involved in these sorts of discussions with their children in school?

Ms. POCOCK. So, we have I think about a hundred parents who participate in our programs to support their young people. And so, at Inside Out, we believe that if parents want to show up as a part-

ner in the success of their young people, they're going to have healthier outcomes.

So, for example, young people who—

Mr. CLOUD. But do parents have a right to know, is my question.

Ms. POCOCK. Do parents have a right to know what? I don't understand what you're asking.

Mr. CLOUD. What their child is dealing with. For example, if there's a child or a teenager in school who's questioning their identity or those sorts of things, do parents have a right to know and be involved in that discussion?

Ms. POCOCK. Well, I'd say it depends. Again, we have young people who show up at our space who are leaving unsafe, abusive homes. And in that case, we have to do everything we can to make sure that young person is safe and protected.

We have—we are constantly filing reports of abuse and neglect because of—parents do not [inaudible] young people who they are.

Mr. CLOUD. I understand the cases of—it sounds like you're deflecting the question a little bit. I understand cases of abuse, there's laws to protect the abused. I mean, schools actually are legally obligated to report cases of abuse, same for churches and the like, anyone who deals with young people.

But do parents have a right? Should they be informed about what's going on? Do they have a right to know what's going on in their kids' lives?

Ms. POCOCK. So, I think, again, those of us who are protecting and supporting young people are there and trusted with the information of the things that they are dealing with.

In terms of parents' rights to know at schools, I mean, here in Colorado parents don't have the right. If a young person is questioning their gender or their sexuality, there are laws in place that say that they have the right to process that with their trusted counselor and so forth.

Mr. CLOUD. So, you do a significant amount of your work with kids even starting at age 13?

Ms. POCOCK. Yes.

Mr. CLOUD. What would be the age of consent then in your mind?

Ms. POCOCK. In our community, the age of consent to mental health therapy is 12 years old.

So, we have laws that enable young people to connect with trusted adults who can support them. That is just so important. It prevents suicide.

And so, we serve young people at 13 because we know they come to us and we can prevent negative health outcomes for them.

Mr. CLOUD. OK. Lately, we've seen a lot of people in the news coming out detransitioning. Could you speak to that phenomenon? What's that person going through? Did they get it wrong? Were they going through a period? Is it just a fluid thing? I mean, could you speak to that?

Ms. POCOCK. Well, you know, I can't really speak to an individual's personal experience. I mean, somebody's gender is just a really personal experience.

But I can speak to you—I've been in this work for a long time. I know a lot of trans folks, close friends, family members.

Mr. CLOUD. The concern is——

Ms. POCOCK. And I just never heard a case of anyone detransitioning. So, I honestly don't think it's a real——

Mr. CLOUD. There's a number of cases in the news right now where this is happening. And the concern parents have is we've all had awkward teen years where we've questioned things and existence and a lot of things.

And the question is, is kids who are maybe making a permanent decision, even without the input of their parents, and making irreversible decisions. There's some who've talked about they can't have kids anymore and they wish they could and the like.

And so, I'm curious how we would work to protect kids. I wish we had more time.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. CLOUD. Because I think this is an important issue to get into.

But thank you for being here.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Thank you.

The gentleman from Maryland, Mr. Raskin, is recognized for five minutes.

Mr. RASKIN. Madam Chair, thank you. And I want to start just by saluting you for your extraordinary and energetic leadership of this committee and your historic leadership as the first woman ever to be the chair of the Oversight and Reform Committee.

And we will continue on all of your major priorities with respect to the Census, the post office, fairness in the immigration process, and of course the Equal Rights Amendment, which we know is so close to your heart.

So, thank you for everything you've done for us.

I want to thank the witnesses for coming and testifying about anti-LGBTQ violence and incitement. And I offer my condolences for the losses all of you suffered at the Club Q shooting last month. We're keeping you all close to our hearts.

When you look at the hostile treatment of minorities in America or in any country on Earth, you find a spectrum of negative actions that can begin just with vilification, demonization, stereotyping. Then it can become statutory discrimination and stigmatization against a minority. And then it can culminate in violence.

And we've seen the most horrific episodes of that kind of violence and some of them are taking place in different parts of the world today.

In recent years, certain state legislators have sought to turn government into an instrument of hostility to and demonization of LGBTQ people. More than 340 pieces of anti-LGBTQ bills were introduced in legislatures across America this year, triple the number that were introduced four years ago. Forty-eight state bills that aim to limit or ban discussion of the existence of gay people have been considered in 21 states.

Mr. Wolf, as an LGBTQ civil rights advocate in Florida, could you speak to us about how Florida's Don't Say Gay law affects you? And what is the effect of these types of bills that seek to promote censorship or invisibility of entire communities?

Mr. WOLF. Yes. Thank you for the question.

And I want to start by acknowledging that Republicans in Florida promised us that the bill was narrow in scope, that it was only focused on preventing young children from being sexualized or learning about sexual topics. And although we told them that the language of the bill was nothing like that and that it had far broader reach than they were saying, they assured us that there would be nothing to worry about.

And so, as a result, what have we seen? Well, we've seen books being banned with LGBTQ characters across the state. We've seen teachers being told to hide their family photos in their desks. We've seen school districts like Miami-Dade County refusing to recognize LGBTQ History Month, for instance, saying that it might violate the Don't Say Gay or Trans law.

Those are just some of the impacts, and they're weighing most heavily on LGBTQ families who fought really hard to see their loved ones recognized and respected. It's weighing on teachers who are fleeing the profession. We have over 9,000 teacher vacancies in Florida, in part because they've been undergoing character assassination over the last couple of years.

And, finally, it's weighing most heavily on LGBTQ young people. The Trevor Project tells us that almost two-thirds of trans young people are experiencing poorer mental health outcomes because of policies like House Bill 1557 in Florida.

So, in short, the debate over the humanity of LGBTQ people is making life harder and less safe for people, especially in the state of Florida.

Mr. RASKIN. Well, thank you for that comprehensive and alarming answer.

Ms. Pocock, how do you think that banning references to LGBTQ people in the classroom and school curriculum affects LGBTQ youth?

Ms. POCOCK. Well, again, this is a situation where we know that when you build an inclusive classroom, you have young folks who are more engaged, more likely to show up at school.

And so, again, the best thing that we can do is prevent negative outcomes by creating an inclusive classroom, an inclusive church, an inclusive home. That is hands down, research shows, the very best thing we can do for young people.

Mr. RASKIN. Ms. Hunt, how do extreme laws like Alabama's law affect the health and safety of LGBTQ youth? This is the one that—well, we've discussed it. But how does it affect the mental and emotional health of the kids in the classroom?

Ms. HUNT. Sure. When children are told that they're not part of society, that they don't have a role and a place in any part of their lives, whether it is being represented in the classroom, whether it's participating in school activities, whether it's receiving healthcare, whether it is just being part of their communities as a whole, it teaches them that they don't belong, that they are lesser than, and that they are not as worthy as their classmates and as their peers.

And that's not the message that we should ever be teaching to young children anywhere in this country.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you very much.

And I yield back, Madam Chair.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentleman's time has expired, and thank you.

We will now hear from the gentleman from Florida, Mr. Donalds. You are now recognized for five minutes.

Mr. DONALDS. Thank you, Madam Chair.

And Madam Chair, it has actually been a pleasure to serve with you. I know we have had disagreements in this committee, but I think what the American people probably don't know is that we've also had very cordial conversations, whether it's in the committee room itself or in the Chamber, the House Chamber, or in the hallways. And so, with whatever the next steps are in your life, good luck, God bless, and I know that this place will miss you.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Thank you very much. And I'm pleased we were able to honor all of your requests for hearings.

Mr. DONALDS. I appreciate that as well. Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Thank you.

Mr. DONALDS. I seem to be slotted in this hearing and it's kind of an appropriate time. Obviously, Florida has been a topic of conversation. Since I am a current congressional Member from Florida, I also served four years in Florida's Legislature, I figure I'm somewhat an expert on Florida law and practices when it comes to the Oversight Committee.

A couple things. One, my first legislative session I was the author of one of those bills that actually allow for community input with respect to material being in the classrooms, books that are being purchased by school districts. House Bill 989, I am the author of that legislation, which was signed by then Governor Rick Scott.

That legislation allowed for parents and taxpayers in the county to be able to bring objections to the local school board for books that were purchased in the classroom for students to view.

Now, I understand at the time the critics, Equality Florida and others, said that it was going to allow for banning of material. But the truth is, the merits of the bill, the actual process of the bill, because I was there when the rulemaking was done, is that there is a systematic approach for every district to take in public comment about material that is going to be purchased by the school district, and then the school district is the one that goes through the purchasing decisions of said material.

So, I guess my question for the panel is, do you think it is appropriate for the taxpayers in a county and the parents in a county to actually be at the table when materials are being purchased by the school district using taxpayer money?

Mr. Wolf, I'll start with you. We can go down the list.

Mr. WOLF. Sure. Equality Florida's stance and my stance has always been that community involvement in education makes education better for young people. And it's important that the entire community is engaged when we're talking about what books we want on shelves, what things we want to be learning in the classroom.

The unfortunate part is that that's not happening in the state of Florida. I'll give you an example. Palm Beach County Schools, as a result of the passage of HB 1557, went around the community

review process and universally banned by decree of the superintendent a whole host of books that had LGBTQ characters in them, that were written by Black authors. And the reason given was that it might be in violation of HB 1557—

Mr. DONALDS. Real quick point on that. Real quick point on that.

So does the superintendent have the authority, since they are hired by the school district and the school district is the body that spends taxpayer money, is responsible for dispensing education, is it the responsibility of a superintendent to actually examine material that should be in the front of children?

Doesn't the superintendent have the responsibility to examine material and make the determination whether it is suitable for a child, let's say, who's eight years old or 10 years old?

Mr. WOLF. I would argue that you just contradicted yourself, that it's either—

Mr. DONALDS. I did not contradict myself, Mr. Wolf. I'm saying that the superintendent also has that ability.

Mr. WOLF. It can't be either the superintendent does it by decree or the community gets input.

Mr. DONALDS. I would argue—

Mr. WOLF. If you believe that the community—

Mr. DONALDS. I would argue that superintendents do a lot of things by decree, not just in Florida but across the country. But 989, the bill that I sponsored, was for material is purchased before it comes into the school district.

Now, once the material is in the school district, yes, the superintendent and his or her assigned can go through and systematically decide what material is allowed in the classroom or not.

OK. This is the one thing I don't like about congressional hearings, because they give us five minutes and there's so much we could've gotten into. It's one of the reasons I'm sponsoring changes to House rules. But that's another story for another day.

I do want to come quick to the essence of the hearing. The violence that has been exhibited against people from the LGBTQ community is horrendous, and it is obscene, and it should not be tolerated.

We were actually in a somewhat similar hearing yesterday on a somewhat similar topic. And when it comes to violence, my thought processes do not change. We cannot tolerate any of that.

At the same time, the thing that we also have to be cognizant of is how we label the perpetrator of said violence, because the narrative in our politics is that violence against Black people or violence against LGBTQ people are somehow coming from White-wing extremists. That is dialog that has happened in this hearing today.

But, Mr. Wolf, I remember when Pulse shooting happened. I was in the legislature at the time. I remember. It was horrific then. The shooter in question is somebody who actually assigned themselves and subscribed themselves to ISIS and to ISIS theoretical, theological leanings, not a right winger, not a left winger, somebody that has views that are abhorrent here in the United States.

So, I think if we're going to discuss these things, we have to make sure—I know I'm over my time, Madam Chair. I apologize.

But I think that what we have to make sure is that we stand up against hate and violence, but we do not at the same time cast

aspersions on our fellow Americans until we actually understand the motives of the individual assailants and then deal with it properly.

With that, I yield back.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentleman yields back.

The gentleman from Texas, Mr. Fallon, is now recognized.

Mr. FALLON. Thank you, Madam Chair.

You know, I want to just speak from the heart and be rather just authentic. And listen, I was listening to the testimony earlier and what—we always fear—as a child you’d fear the bogeyman and the six-arm lady in the closet and all these illogical fears that we have. But unfortunately, there are folks that are in the wrong place at the wrong time with evil that lurks.

Mr. Wolf, you were one of those folks being there. It’s horrific, as my colleague said, and my heart goes out to you.

What I want to avoid, though, is to place blame on people that have a different political philosophy, because the vast majority, and I’m talking 99.999 and you just keep going of Americans, don’t want to harm anyone and don’t harm anyone.

And so, to place blame on an ideology—because I think you said earlier right-wing extremism. I caught that. And I’m sorry, because we were running different hearings.

Do you fear, Mr. Wolf, left-wing extremism?

Mr. WOLF. I would say that based on the Department of Homeland Security’s recent report that said domestic terror threats are focused right now on communities like mine, that has driven fear around how the rhetoric people use about LGBTQ people may result in violence.

Mr. FALLON. So, you don’t—so do you—so you don’t fear left-wing extremism?

Mr. WOLF. Do you have an example of a left-wing extremist engaging in anti-LGBTQ violence?

Mr. CLOUD. Do you know who James T. Hodgkinson is?

Mr. WOLF. I don’t.

Mr. CLOUD. OK. Do you know of any historical incidents where there were multiple Members of Congress murdered or assassinated, are you aware of any, in the country’s 250-year history?

Mr. WOLF. Yes, yes. Yes.

Mr. FALLON. I’m not aware of any multiple incidents like that. I don’t think it has happened, fortunately, in history because we’d go down a very dark tunnel if that did occur.

But it almost did occur. A few years back, James T. Hodgkinson shot Steve Scalise, who’s now the majority leader, or will soon be the majority leader in the next Congress, and almost killed him. And was asked, do you know James T. Hodgkinson’s political affiliation? He was a Bernie Sanders acolyte. He was a big fan of Bernie Sanders.

None of us blamed Bernie Sanders for that shooting, because he didn’t do it. Now, there’s rhetoric on that side that could encourage very unstable people, but unstable people are dangerous inherently.

And the thing is, if Steve Scalise wasn’t there, because he had a detail because he was, I believe, the minority whip at the time,

I wasn't here, he had a security detail that ended up eliminating that threat and killing that man.

Had he not been there, you're probably looking at 15 to 20 Republican Members of Congress that would've been murdered. He even asked—because they were at a baseball practice in the morning—he even asked, “Are you Republicans?” And when they said yes, that's when the rifle came out and that's when the gun came out.

The only person responsible for that shooting was that man. No one else. And I've tried to be very careful about that. Because would you agree that this is something that a Member of Congress should say talking about folks that we disagree with? There were several quotes—sorry. It's what happens when you go on to multiple committee hearings here.

Would you agree with this? If a Republican said we've got to stay on the street and we've got to get more active and we've got to get more confrontational, we've got to make sure that they know we mean business. You find that incendiary at all?

Mr. WOLF. If we're talking about peacefully protesting injustice—

Mr. FALLON. Confrontational, getting in their face. There needs to be unrest in the streets. You think that could be incendiary at all?

Mr. WOLF. I don't know the context of what you're talking about.

Ms. FALLON. All right. Well, that was Ayanna Pressley and Maxine Waters, Democratic Members of Congress, said that. And I don't want people to get into somebody's face and get confrontational. They can certainly disagree. We can disagree civilly.

But the Pulse Nightclub shooting, was that perpetrated by a right-wing extremist?

Mr. WOLF. The Pulse Nightclub shooting was perpetrated by a man who pledged allegiance to ISIS.

Mr. FALLON. So, the answer to that question would be no.

Mr. WOLF. I don't know what his—

Mr. CLOUD. Because I don't think there's many ISIS members that are terrorists and also GOP voters, in fact. I would venture to guess that that doesn't exist on the planet.

Mr. WOLF. To clarify, I didn't say GOP voters.

Mr. FALLON. OK. You said right-wing extremists. So, we would classify the evil individual that murdered 49 and wounded 53 and probably gives you nightmares and will for the rest of your life was not a right-wing extremist.

Mr. WOLF. Is that a question?

Mr. FALLON. Yes.

Mr. WOLF. I would say this hearing is about the structural and systemic issues that are escalating anti-LGBTQ violence across the country.

Mr. FALLON. Well, we got to be careful about our language because we don't want to point fingers at anybody other than the people that actually perpetuate this evil and this criminal violence.

We have a method of redress in this country. We're very free to do so. And that's why I've always condemned all political violence,

because there's no need for it, because we do have the right to protest.

And I am very sorry about what you and those other victims went through. It's horrific and I'm praying for you. God bless.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. FALLON. I yield back.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentlewoman from Missouri, Ms. Bush, is now recognized for five minutes.

Ms. BUSH.

Ms. BUSH. Yes. St. Louis and I thank you, Madam Chair, for convening this important hearing.

And let me say to the witnesses, thank you for your testimony, thank you for staying. And sorry you have to listen to the White supremacy raise its ugly head throughout this hearing, but we're here to fight it. And so just want to make sure you know that.

The rise of hate and violence—

Mr. COMER. That, Madam Chair—I mean, my God.

Ms. BUSH [continuing]. Against the LGBTQIA community follows a surge of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation driven by Republican state lawmakers, including in my home state of Missouri.

The Human Rights Campaign has found that Republican state legislators have introduced and supported over 340 anti-queer and/or—trans bills in the latest legislative session, and 25 extreme discriminatory bills have already been signed into law across this country.

According to PROMO Missouri, in 2020 the Missouri State House introduced 23 pieces of anti-LGBT+ legislation. They've repeatedly—it's absolutely disgusting—filed library book bans, bans on doctor-recommended care, student organization bans, and sports bans.

Ms. Robinson, could you tell us more about the draconian measures state Republicans have advanced that target the health, the safety, and the rights of our LGBT+ community?

Ms. ROBINSON. It's a crisis that we're experiencing. We are trying to simply be able to live freely, safely, and wholly as our true selves in every aspect of life and what we see is continued legislative attacks paired with extremist rhetoric. And when some of these bills are moving forward, whether or not they're enacted, it has a devastating impact on our community.

Looking at Florida, again, as a Don't Say Gay or Trans bill was moving in the state legislature, we saw it paired with an intentional social media campaign that resulted in a 400 percent increase in anti-LGBTQ+ hate and slurs happening online—and the majority of it was perpetrated by 10 bad actors.

This is the stuff that we have to make sure that we're interrupting and ending. This is what's creating a dangerous environment for our children, for our kids, and for our families.

Ms. BUSH. Thank you.

Hate drives these Republican bills, which, in turn, drive dangerous hate and violence toward our LGBTQ+ community. In Missouri, my state, we have seen multiple hate-driven murders of our trans siblings in recent years.

As part of Missouri's Republicans' obsessive attack on trans and gay rights, they introduced legislation that would have

criminalized parents and health services for providing care approved by the American Academy of Pediatrics and other leading organizations. They even sought to turn bills into ballot initiatives to drum up further hate and have run for office on platforms grounded in anti-LGBTQ+ hate.

Dr. Meyer, what is the connection between the Republican crusade to target the LGBTQ+ community and the surge of hateful anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric online?

Mr. MEYER. Thank you.

Yes, I think that this rhetoric fuels, as I said before, what is already underlying American culture and history, and to fan these hateful messages just encourages bad actors.

And I agree with what was said here. There are bad actors. But we also have to pay attention to the environment in which we live and the kind of environment either inhibits or encourages hateful acts.

So, thank you.

Ms. BUSH. Thank you.

Ms. Hunt, let me turn to you. How is America's transgender community disproportionately harmed by the extremism and the violence the committee is examining today, particularly speaking about Black and Brown transgender women?

Ms. HUNT. One thing that we see repeatedly in the studies that we've done on the trans population is that trans people are about, on average, three to four times as likely to experience almost any negative outcome that you can expect in our society, be that unemployment, direct violence, negative experiences with the police, homelessness, discrimination in healthcare.

Anything along those lines tends to hit trans people about three to five times as high as the national—pardon me—three to five times as much as the national average.

And what we see consistently through all of these numbers is that trans people of color, particularly Black trans women and indigenous trans women, experience three to four times as high negative results—or negative outcomes—on all of those actors.

Ms. BUSH. Thank you.

The rise of anti-queer and/or—trans extremism is a danger to our country, our nation, and we must act swiftly and urgently to eliminate it.

Thank you. And I yield back.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentlelady's time has expired.

The gentleman, the ranking member, from Kentucky—

Ms. HERRELL. Madam Chair?

Chairwoman MALONEY.—Is now recognized, Mr. Comer, for five minutes.

Ms. HERRELL. Madam Chair?

Mr. COMER. Thank you, Madam Chair.

You know, I'm not even going to comment on what Ms. Bush said. But I'll say this. Crime's going to be a top priority for the Republicans on this committee in the next Congress. And perhaps Ms. Bush could come give us some pointers on how she's reduced crime in St. Louis since she's been in Congress and what her ideas are to further reduce crime in St. Louis.

But wait a minute. St. Louis has one of the highest crime rates in America.

So maybe she can come tell us how to secure the border and give her expertise on crime moving forward, because that's what the issue is in America. We have a crime rate that's out of control and we have to do better in America.

Mr. Lehman, your testimony makes the case that hate crime offenders are not specialists. These criminals often have prior criminal offenses. Can you explain how our current justice system is set up to handle bias-based crimes?

Mr. LEHMAN. Can you just clarify what specific component you're asking about? How bias-based crimes work or how we're responding to them currently?

Mr. COMER. Both.

Mr. LEHMAN. So, the law on bias-based crime or hate crime varies across jurisdiction, varies across state. You'll observe, for example, there's a marked increase in offenses against transgender people reported to the FBI since 2012. A lot of that is just because, prior to that, hate crime laws in the United States did not incorporate transgender people, and they still don't in some states.

In most cases of bias-motivated defense is hate crimes are enhancements to other offenses. They're charging enhancements for another offense. So, if I shoot somebody, I would get one sentence. And if I shoot them in a way that is motivated by—provably motivated by my beliefs about them or their membership in a protected class, there can be a higher sentence associated with that.

Does that answer the question?

Mr. COMER. So let me ask you this question.

Mr. LEHMAN. Please.

Mr. COMER. The Club Q shooter had been previously arrested for making violent threats against their mother, which ended in a standoff with the law enforcement. That's pretty serious. The case was dismissed due to the family's refusal to cooperate.

You stated in your testimony that had prosecutors succeeded in eliciting the cooperation, five people might be alive today.

How essential is it that prosecutors remain strong-armed on crime and see these cases through?

Mr. LEHMAN. Absolutely. Prosecuting hate crime is challenging. That component that I referred to earlier, proving that somebody has a bias motivation is hard. It's actually gotten easier in the age of social media because people write down their thoughts so much more, but it's still very challenging. Best practices are not widely understood.

So, I think it's important, particularly in hate crime cases, that prosecutors dedicate substantial resources to clearing the case. There are often abysmal clearance rates on hate crime.

For example, in New York City, I think the Bronx district attorney's office cleared, I think, 15 percent of hate crimes referred to it. It's a real challenge. They need to put more effort into it.

Mr. COMER. Right. Well, and this is obviously something, Madam Chair, I appreciate the hearing, because crime is out of control against everyone, the LGBTQ community, the Jewish community, we've seen crime increases at historically Black colleges and universities, Christian groups.

So, we need to do better and this should be a topic of priority for the next Congress. Certainly, we need to look at the prosecutors because we have—especially in the Speaker’s home city of San Francisco, the prosecutor was just recalled. I don’t think anyone’s going to classify San Francisco as a bastion of conservative voters.

He was recalled for not prosecuting. And I think that people in America want prosecutors to do their job and hold criminals accountable and keep them off the street.

So, that’s going to be a priority. We certainly want to focus on securing the southern border. We believe that’s a problem, especially when you look at the fentanyl and drug overdoses in America. We certainly want to fund our law enforcement.

Obviously, there are always going to be bad actors in law enforcement as in every other profession. They need to be held accountable. But we have to take crime seriously because that is the top issue, one of the top issues among the voters, especially in the last midterm election.

So, Madam Chair, I look forward to working with this committee addressing the issue of crime in the next Congress.

And I yield back.

Chairwoman MALONEY. OK.

The gentlelady from Massachusetts, Ms. Pressley, is now recognized for five minutes.

Ms. PRESSLEY. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Earlier today we heard from survivors of the Club Q nightclub shooting in Colorado Springs and the Pulse Nightclub shooting in Florida. I certainly look forward to a day where people do not have to relive their trauma in order to compel action, but I am grateful for the survivors who spoke today.

Thank you for turning the deep pain and trauma that you’ve experienced into purpose. Hearing these accounts today was heartbreaking, and we know that your lives have been changed forever.

In response to this tragedy, the fact that you have come here displaying great dignity and poise in the midst of it all certainly makes this institution better, and we thank you.

Now, in stark contrast, we have Republicans in state legislatures across this country who continue to introduce and pass legislation undermining the rights of LGBTQ people, despite clear evidence that these tactics cause violence and loss of life.

Certainly, here in Congress, we don’t need to be reminded that hate speech leads to hateful violence. January 6 was certainly evidence of that.

Now, in my congressional district, healthcare providers have experienced threats and attacks that have disrupted their provision of medical care to the LGBTQ community, who are already disproportionately facing barriers in accessing healthcare.

Dr. Meyer, how do LGBTQ+ individuals disproportionately experience health inequities?

Mr. MEYER. Thank you.

I think the challenge for LGBTQ people in seeking healthcare is that providers are not qualified enough or not knowledgeable enough. And this is particularly true for transgender individuals across the country who report that when they go to see a provider, often they’re the ones who have to teach the provider about

transgender care and give them resources to help them help the patient.

I think that the other side of it is that LGBTQ people also experience greater mental and physical health problems resulting from prejudice and discrimination and, therefore, need those services even more so.

Ms. PRESSLEY. Thank you, Dr. Meyer.

And what we have seen is a policy violence in nearly half of the states in our country, which have introduced 43 bills this year alone that only would deepen those inequities, particularly for transgender people, by restricting access to gender-affirming care, including four states that have enacted total or partial bans. And Republicans in the House have introduced similar bills to block access to this necessary and appropriate medical care nationally.

Ms. Hunt, why is gender-affirming care so vital for transgender people?

Ms. HUNT. Thank you for shedding light on that.

So, one of the things that we see most often in trans people's lives is very high experience of negative mental health outcomes. People will have extremely high levels of severe depression, suicidal ideation. There are lot of numbers that have floated around in social media spaces for years, sourced backed to some of the surveys that we did 10, 7, and 14 years ago, specifically, on these subjects.

And one of the things that we found in subsequent studies done by several organizations, including the Trevor Project, is that just providing access to transition-related medical care reduces the significant negative mental health outcomes for transgender youth by nearly two-thirds.

When we have a treatment that is just that effective in improving people's lives, it is fundamental that we need to make sure that everybody who needs that care is able to access it. This is something that improves and is necessary for trans people to fully participate in society.

Thank you.

Ms. PRESSLEY. Thank you. Absolutely. Transgender individuals deserve to receive essential lifesaving gender-affirming healthcare and our medical personnel should be able to provide it without fear of being attacked.

Last month I joined colleagues in sending a letter to the Department of Justice regarding the violent anti-trans threats that have been made against providers of gender-affirming care and the ways that online platforms are fueling this violence.

I just want to close with Mr. Wolf.

I believe it is really important to center survivors in our discussion here. So let me close with you. How have these threats impacted you and your fellow survivors personally?

Mr. WOLF. Yes. Thank you.

Well, first of all, it breaks my heart because it has resulted in further violence. It's really hard to have gone through something like Pulse and have a desire to make the world a better place and to ensure that no community ever goes through it again, and then to turn around and see it recur, not just in Colorado Springs, but really around the country.

So, I can say that it's been a very challenging time for people in Orlando. It's a challenging time for survivors of violence against LGBTQ people.

And I also am grateful for this committee. I'm grateful for this hearing that we're shining a light on what I think is an urgent crisis in the country.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentlelady's time has expired.

The gentlewoman from California, Ms. Porter, is now recognized for five minutes.

Ms. PORTER. Thank you very much.

I want to start by acknowledging with gratitude everything that Chair Maloney has done for Oversight, including, importantly, lifting up voices of Americans whose needs, whose concerns, whose lives, whose rights are sometimes not recognized. And she has been long a champion for doing that for women, but seeing her do that for Americans across the country and across demographics has really meant a lot to me personally.

So, I just want to take a few seconds to say thank you very much, Chair Maloney. You will be greatly, greatly missed. And I will continue to admire and be inspired by you as I work on Oversight in the coming years.

I wanted to start with Ms. Robinson, if I could.

Your organization recently released a report analyzing the 500 most viewed, most influential tweets that identified LGBTQ people as so-called groomers.

The groomer narrative is an age-old lie to position LGBTQ+ people as a threat to kids, and what it does is deny them access to public spaces, it stokes fear, and can even stoke violence.

Ms. Robinson, according to its own hateful content policy, does Twitter allow posts calling LGBTQ people groomers?

Ms. ROBINSON. No. I mean, Twitter, along with Facebook and many others, have community guidelines. It's about holding users accountable to those guidelines and acknowledging that when we use phrases and words like "groomers" and "pedophiles" to describe people, individuals in our communities that are mothers, that are fathers, that are teachers, that are doctors, it is dangerous.

And it's got one purpose: It is to dehumanize us and make us feel like we are not a part of this American society, and it has real-life consequences. So, we are calling on social media companies to uphold their community standards.

And we're also calling on any American that's seeing this play out to hold ourselves and our community members accountable. We wouldn't accept this in our families, we wouldn't accept this in our schools, there's no reason to accept it online.

Ms. PORTER. So, I mean, I think you're absolutely right. And it's not—this allegation of groomer and pedophile, it is alleging that a person is criminal somehow and engaged in criminal acts merely because of their identity, their sexual orientation, their gender identity.

So, this is clearly prohibited under Twitter's content, yet you found hundreds of these posts on the platform. Your team filed complaints about these posts, correct?

Ms. ROBINSON. Yes.

Ms. PORTER. And how often did Twitter act to take down these posts which violated its own content policy?

Ms. ROBINSON. Very rarely.

Ms. PORTER. So, from our calculation, it looks like about 99 percent of your complaints, they basically acted on one or two of the hundred-plus complaints you filed. Instead of taking them down, Twitter elevated them, allowing them to reach an approximate 72 million users.

This is not just about what happens online. What happens online translates into real harms in people's lives.

Ms. Pocock, you provide services to a community that experienced a devastating LGBTQ attack. Can you provide some examples of the link between speech online and attacks against providers like you?

Ms. POCOCK. We know really online threats mean, in addition to just creating an atmosphere of bullying for young people, it also creates an atmosphere of delegitimizing our real professional trained work at Inside Out Youth Services. And it's just so critically important that we can continue doing the work that we do.

But I want to tell just one quick story because it's beautiful.

We have an online community center, and it is moderated by peer advisers, and when asked how many issues of, like, fighting or contention do you deal with on the Discord server, and our young people tell us, well, it doesn't happen very often.

So, I'm here to tell you that our young people have figured out how to moderate platforms in positive, productive ways. Twitter, Facebook, everybody else can figure it out, too.

Ms. PORTER. Absolutely.

Ms. Robinson, your report notes that these radicalizing posts, these groomer posts, these other posts that attack LGBTQ communities are related to acts in the real world. What happens online is often reflective of what happens in the real world.

After Governor DeSantis, Governor DeSantis of Florida, passed his so-called Don't Say Gay bill, what trends did you observe online with regard to grooming-related discourse?

Ms. ROBINSON. Unfortunately, we saw a 400 percent increase on Twitter, this sort of hateful language, particularly calling our community members "groomers" and "pedophiles." And we know that whether or not the bills move into effect, the lasting impact of that online bullying of defining our communities in that way, it sticks, especially with our kids.

Ms. PORTER. Well, I just want to—my time has expired—but I just want to say I'm proud to say gay, I'm proud to stand with the gay community, and I'm proud that you all are here today as part of our country and giving us testimony.

I yield back, Madam Chair.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The lady yields back.

The gentleman from Rhode Island, Mr. Cicilline, who is the founder of the Equality Caucus, which he chairs.

Mr. Cicilline.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Chairwoman Maloney. I want to also thank you for holding this important hearing and for being such a strong champion for the LGBTQ+ community throughout your entire public life.

I want to begin by reminding everyone here, especially my colleagues across the aisle, what this hearing is about. It's entitled, "The Rise of Anti-LGBTQ+ Extremism and Violence in the United States." And despite this hearing title—colleagues on both sides of the aisle have obviously condemned the attack at Club Q and violence more broadly at today's hearing—it's also telling that the Republicans on this committee, with one exception, have not asked any questions about anti-LGBTQI+ extremism and violence. Instead, they've only wanted to talk about crime broadly or hate crimes against other communities.

I'm disappointed, yet not surprised, that a few weeks after a killer murdered five people at an LGBTQI+ nightclub, the Republicans on this committee could not bring themselves to discuss anti-LGBTQI+ violence and its causes with our witnesses.

Our community is scared, terrified that we'll be attacked going to the doctor, scared that we'll be attacked going to nightclubs, scared that we'll be attacked simply for living as our authentic selves. And, unfortunately, this fear is well grounded.

The attack at Club Q is only the latest high-profile example of violence against our community. In 2021, 20 percent of all reported hate crimes were motivated by hate based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

Let me repeat that.

Despite the fact that LGBTQ+ people make up roughly seven percent of the population, 20 percent, or more than one in five reported hate crimes last year were motivated by sexual orientation or gender identity bias.

My colleagues want to talk about anything but this anti-LGBTQI violence and their rhetoric that is contributing to it. This violence is impacting both LGBTQI+ people and our families.

I ask unanimous consent to enter into the record statements from the Equality Caucus Transgender Equality Task Force co-chairs Representatives Jayapal, Wexton, and Newman about the fear that they and their families are experiencing in the wake of anti-trans rhetoric and violence.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Without objection.

Mr. CICILLINE. No one should have to fear violence because of who they are or who their family members are, but this violence is not happening in a vacuum. Politicians at all levels of government are targeting our communities, spreading misinformation, and looking to restrict our rights.

Republicans are happy to discuss our community when they're attacking our rights, when they're crying on the House floor because they oppose marriage equality, or when they're releasing statements attacking our community in press releases that they introduce new bills targeting our community.

But when it comes to actually discussing the violence against our community and its causes, just a quick condemnation of what happened at Club Q and violence broadly and nothing more.

In my view this is shameful.

And so, I want to begin, Ms. Robinson, again, to thank all of the witnesses for being here today. Ms. Robinson, as we near the end of this hearing, is there anything that we've not covered yet relat-

ing to anti-LGBTQ+ extremism and violence that you would like to share for the record?

Ms. ROBINSON. We can do something about this. We can ensure that social media companies uphold their community standards. We can pass the Equality Act to ensure that LGBTQ+ people actually don't have legalized discrimination happening to them in more than half of the states.

We can, as a community, step up and say that we wholeheartedly, no matter what our party affiliation is, repudiate and rebuke these horrendous attacks on our people.

There is work to be done. And especially on this 10-year mark of Sandy Hook, we can do something to end this epidemic of gun violence. We have to and we must.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you.

And, Mr. Wolf, thank you so much for being here and for sharing your story.

What message do you have to politicians who are championing bills to limit the rights of the LGBTQI+ community?

Mr. WOLF. Thank you. I'm grateful to be here.

And my message is simple. Words have consequences. Somebody has to pay the price for unmitigated, unbridled hatred, the kind of hatred we have seen on the rise across this country. We've heard a lot about accountability in this hearing, and I'm glad we're talking about accountability.

No one is asking for anyone but the shooter at Club Q to be on trial in Colorado Springs. But what we are saying is that people should be accountable for the things that come out of their mouths. And, when you're willing to traffic in cheap shots and bigotry against a marginalized community that's already seeing hate against it on the rise, that's already seeing violence rising across the country, when you're willing to traffic in those things to score political points, you have to be accountable for what happens next. You have to hold yourself accountable for the impacts of your words.

Words really do have consequences. Unfortunately, communities like mine have felt them. We have to do better than we are today.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you.

And I want to thank you, Madam Chair, for allowing me to waive onto the committee for this hearing, and I think, to Mr. Wolf's point, we not only have to condemn these statements and this rhetoric, but we sadly have Members of the Congress of the United States that are engaging in the use of some of this very inflammatory rhetoric against the LGBTQI community—

Chairwoman MALONEY. Yes. The gentleman's time—

Mr. CICILLINE [continuing]. And it needs to stop now.

Chairwoman MALONEY.—Has expired.

Mr. CICILLINE. I yield back.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentleman's time has expired.

The gentleman from New York, Mr. Mondaire Jones, is now recognized.

Mr. JONES. Thank you, Madam Chair. And I join the course of my colleagues in celebrating your tremendous service in this body over the past several decades and your just stalwart championing our community, the LGBTQI+ community. So, thank you for that.

As I said on the floor of the House during debate on the Equality Act, to grow up poor, Black, and gay is to not see yourself anywhere. It is also to feel completely unseen as so many people around you invalidate your very existence.

Growing up, like many people in this room, I suspect, I watched as mostly—as straight politicians, many of them White, many of them men, used my basic human rights as a political football to further their careers. And now, as the first openly Black gay Member in this body, I'm even more familiar with the vile, anti-LGBTQ rhetoric that terrorizes our community and that somehow is even more harmful when it's aimed at queer people of color.

Let me also just say, to amplify what Representative Porter had discussed previously, that I and people on my team have also reported many of these Twitter accounts that have hurled explicitly homophobic insults at me in particular, and have received emails stating that they are not somehow in violation of Twitter's purported standards, and so clearly there is something amiss at Twitter, but I think many of us have known that now for the past few months given the leadership changes.

Many of us are scared for our lives, and rightfully so. LGBTQ Americans know that gay bars and clubs are sanctuaries for our community to gather without fear of being judged simply for being who they are. For many, these spaces become second homes where we can experience the full freedom to be ourselves.

Such was the case for me. In my first year of law school, when I was still closeted, the gay bars of New York City were the only place I could be my authentic self, and those spaces helped me to come out and to be the man—the Congressman that I am today.

I cannot imagine my journey to self-acceptance and understanding without these sanctuaries, which are now under assault.

The horrific mass shootings at Pulse Nightclub and Club Q create fear among LGBTQ Americans that gay bars and clubs, these places of refuge for members of our community, are no longer safe. These attacks alongside other acts of violence against our community and the growing course of hate and disinformation against LGBTQ people tell us that over the past few years, this country has become a more dangerous place for us to live, unfortunately.

Even those who simply provide services essential to the mental and physical well-being of members of our community are under attack. Earlier this month, a doctor affiliated with the national LGBTQIA+ Health Education Center in Boston faced credible death threats for their role in providing gender-affirming care to transgender youth.

The following day, the First Unitarian Universalist Church in Columbus, Ohio was forced to cancel a family friendly, holiday-themed drag queen storytelling event after a far-right extremist from the Proud Boys and the Patriot Front showed up to protest, armed with AR-15s, dressed in military gear, chanting far-right slogans, and performing Nazi salutes. When leaders across the country, including sitting Members of Congress, are peddling age-old hateful and false narratives about grooming and pedophilia, these are the types of people who show up in response.

A recent Human Rights Campaign report found that, as Florida state government enacted its discriminatory Don't Say Gay law,

anti-LGBTQ misinformation surged by over 400 percent on social media platforms. And worse, instead of condemning this deadly wave of misinformation and hate, Members of this body have added fuel to the fire.

In October of this year, Representative Mike Johnson of Louisiana introduced his own Don't Say Gay bill to amplify this hateful policy on a national scale, and dozens of Members of this body co-sponsored that legislation. Shame on them.

If enacted, Mr. Johnson's heinous bill would, among other things, prohibit federally funded schools from providing sex education or library books to children under 10 that include LGBTQ topics. In doing so, his bill would send a message to LGBTQ children in the most vulnerable stage of their lives that they are an other, whose very existence society refuses to recognize.

It is hard, in closing, to listen to the stories of Club Q and Pulse nightclub survivors and not be in awe of their bravery and resilience, and so, I thank you for your courage. I'm furious that our community is forced to live again and again with this pain, but I am optimistic about the future of this country with your leadership and with people——

Chairwoman MALONEY. OK. Thank you.

Mr. JONES [continuing]. Of good conscience in this body.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentleman's time has expired——

Mr. JONES. I yield back, Madam Chair.

Chairwoman MALONEY.—and voting—votes have been called.

So, I now recognize the gentleman, Vice Chair Gomez. You are recognized for five minutes.

Mr. GOMEZ. Thank you, Madam Chair, for calling this important hearing. And, as we've known for far too long, words have consequences, especially when they're coming from our elected leaders. A rise of anti-LGBTQ violence is unequivocally linked with the rise of inflammatory, dangerous rhetoric coming from the far right, especially since the election of former President Trump.

Make no mistake, those on the far right who are spreading misinformation and hateful rhetoric are often the same individuals and groups who helped orchestrate and carry out the January 6th insurrection. Just like in the aftermath of the 2020 election, extremists are intentionally manufacturing falsehoods about the LGBTQ community. They're attempting to stir violence and scare Americans as they push their radical agenda to roll back the clock on civil rights.

People look to their elected leaders to tell them the truth. Instead, Republican candidates and politicians pair misinformation and hate, giving these deadly lies a much larger platform. When violent extremists believe these lies, it paints a target on the backs of the LGBTQ communities and leads to real-world violence.

Now, Republican lawmakers across the country are moving to make discrimination official government policy. This year alone, we've seen more than 20 states introduce Don't Say Gay bills aimed at erasing LGBTQ history and culture from being taught and denying LGBTQ students the ability to be supported and affirmed in their education.

But it's not just at the state level. In October, 38 of my Republican colleagues introduced Federal legislation inspired by Florida's

Don't Say Gay or Trans law, which would restrict Federal funding for schools that incorporate curriculum that recognizes and supports LGBTQ students.

Ms. Pocock, what is a Federal Don't Say—why is a Federal Don't Say Gay or Trans bill so dangerous, particularly for LGBTQ youth, and how does it risk further undermining the health and safety of LGBTQ young people?

Ms. POCOCK. Thank you.

You know, the difficulty of this—of a bill like a Don't Say Gay bill is that it erases us. It doesn't amplify to young people their mentors—teachers, Congressmen, Congresswomen—who are similar to them, who are doing really incredible work for our country. It doesn't set the platform up for them to see themselves in their future. But it also minimizes the experience of their families. And so, really, again, the best thing we can do for young people is see them, hear them, and recognize them.

Mr. GOMEZ. Thank you.

As somebody who has a sibling who is gay, I grew up back in a very conservative area of California back in the 1980's, Riverside, and not seeing individuals who are—had leadership positions or also just straight-up discriminated against because they're LGBTQ, gay or lesbian, or nonbinary or trans, it was something I know had a profound impact on him, but also on myself. It's something that made me question why things are the way they are, why are somebody that I care about, somebody that I love deeply is being punished for who they are?

And schools, oftentimes when you don't get their affirmation in your school, then you don't want to go to school. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, my brother never finished high school, but he ended up going and getting his GED. He was smarter than I ever was or would be. He ended up going off to UC-Santa Cruz and getting his degree and became a teacher, an educator. But it is—those—showing those examples, I think, does make a difference.

And so, thank you for mentioning that, Doctor, because I think that's what we need to ensure.

So, this is not the end of this discussion and the end of this fight, but we're going to keep pushing back on that rhetoric that I believe is so dangerous for the health of our young people, but also just for our communities as a whole.

And, with the last remaining time I have, I just want to congratulate Chairwoman Maloney for her tenure here in Congress, and then also being a champion for women's rights, LGBT rights, the disenfranchised, and ensuring that we have a stronger democracy.

With that, I yield back.

Congratulations, Madam Chairman—Chairwoman.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Thank you so much.

And I now recognize myself.

We are experiencing a crisis, and I must say that the panelists—first, I want to thank all of my colleagues that participated, but the panel was a particularly articulate and informed one. You gave us a great deal to think about on a very difficult subject.

This was put together very quickly by the health team and the domestic policy team. I particularly want to thank Miles Lichtman

and Daniel Yim for an excellent job putting this together. We're very grateful, and all of your entire team. We'll continue working on these important issues.

Today's hearing is one of the final hearings of the 117th Congress, examining one of the most pressing issues that our nation will face in the years to come, the rise of extremism and violence targeting LGBTQI+ people in the United States.

We heard from the brave survivors of violent attacks against the LGBTQI community, nightclubs in Colorado Springs and Orlando. And these stories were heartbreaking, because they should not have to be so brave. Like every person who goes out to celebrate with their friends and their loved ones, they deserve to be joyful and free and secure in our country.

While today's hearing examined the challenges our society faces in ensuring that LGBTQI people can exist free from violence and bigotry, it also offered a vision for a more inspiring future, one where LGBTQI people have the freedom to live authentically and freely and safely.

As our nation continues to grapple with this recent tragedy at Club Q, I hope that we and Congress can look inward and find the courage to not only stand against this bigotry, but to also take bold action to end it.

We can do this by building on the progress of the past several months, which includes codifying protections for the same-sex marriages and enacting the first commonsense gun safety package in decades, a package that followed this committee's hearing examining the senseless violence that occurred in Uvalde, Buffalo, and other communities across the United States.

But, as we remember—as we remember the 20 children and the six educators who lost their lives at Sandy Hook years ago, we are reminded that much more needs to be done to stop senseless bloodshed.

I applaud President Biden for his action yesterday in signing the important bill on marriage equality.

Now, before I conclude, I would like to enter into the record a number of statements the committee received ahead of today's hearings. These were submissions from my colleagues, Congresswoman Jayapal, Congresswoman Wexton, Congresswoman Newman; Dr. Meredith McNamara, who provides critically needed care to younger patients who are transgender in New Haven, Connecticut; the Whitman-Walker Institute; and more than 40 LGBTQI+ rights advocacy organizations in support of gender-affirming care: The National Women's Law Center, the National Education Association, and the United States Professional Association for Transgender Health.

There was a tremendous outpouring of support and interest in this hearing. We thank all of you very, very much.

And, with that, I'd like to conclude by saying that our panelists were remarkable. We thank you for your remarks, and I commend my colleagues.

And, without objection, all members will have five legislative days within which to submit extraneous materials and to submit additional written questions for the witnesses to the chair, which

will be forwarded to the witnesses, and we hope we'll have your swift response.

I ask our witnesses to please respond as promptly as possible.

And, with that, this hearing is adjourned, and I am running to vote.

[Whereupon, at 1:31 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

